

American Thought and Culture

IN THE  
MID-  
TWENTIETH  
CENTURY

# AT THE CENTER



CASEY NELSON BLAKE, DANIEL H. BORUS,  
AND HOWARD BRICK

At the Center

## **American Thought and Culture**

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# At the Center

*American Thought and Culture in  
the Mid-Twentieth Century*

Casey Nelson Blake,  
Daniel H. Borus, and Howard Brick

Foreword by Dorothy Ross

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For Lewis Perry  
founder





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## Foreword

Thirty years ago, this series in the *History of American Thought and Culture* began with the aim of offering concise, provocative volumes that, taken together, would survey the long span of American intellectual and cultural life from the sixteenth century to the present. Since then, the output of richly documented monographs in the field has continued to grow, sustaining the demand for inventive historical syntheses. The goal of this series has always been to bring together books that are readable and well informed and that stand on their own as introductions to significant periods in American thought and culture. There is no attempt to establish a single interpretation of all of America's past, for the diversity, conflict, and change that are the features of the American experience would frustrate any such attempt. All the authors in the series, innovative practitioners in the field in their own right, bring their independent research to bear as they strive for a broad reach in interpretation. They aim to explore issues that are of critical importance to the particular period under discussion and, on that basis, to cast new light on the whole of the American experience as it shaped that time and was transformed by it.

In this last book in the series, three distinguished historians—Casey Blake, Daniel Borus, and Howard Brick—bring these aims to the crucial years after World War II from 1948 to 1963. Deliberately written against the common, flattened view of the Cold War 1950s, this is the first comprehensive study of American thought and culture during those critical years. It is also a strikingly original and nuanced account of Americans' responses to the traumatic events of midcentury and to the country's new place in the

world. The authors make a strong case for the search for “centeredness” as the unifying theme in the thought and culture of the era: what thinkers of all stripes sought were fundamentals, the universal, the holistic, the scientifically necessary, and the stable.

The desire for centeredness in these forms reflected both the anxieties generated by the postwar world and the confidence to address them. The authors are original in showing the importance of historicity and time to these discordant impulses. The rise of totalitarianism and the brutal war shattered Americans’ hopeful views of progress. The history that had created the modern world could not be trusted. If the twentieth century began with a Progressive Era revolt against formalism—a recognition of America’s immersion in a changing history and a move toward the provisionality of knowledge, the 1950s marked for many thinkers an opposite turn against history and a search for fixed truths and a less problematic modernity.

Readers will find here the full range of American thought and culture, from public and academic discussion by intellectuals to cultural forms like popular films and comics and highbrow literature and the arts; from Cold War political views to new debates about Pan-Africanism and women’s rights. Major figures, like the literary critic F. O. Matthiessen, the philosopher of totalitarianism Hannah Arendt, and the artist Jackson Pollock, loom large in the analysis, but a host of others widen the usual discussion. We meet well-known victims of domestic anticommunism but also George Kahin, a scholar of Indonesia whose career path and nuanced views defied that narrative. Modernism appears not only in the form of Pollock’s abstract expressionism but also in the Black Mountain artists’ very different aesthetic of “relationality.”

Centeredness thus appears here as a complement of variety and change. The authors reposition American thought and culture from the liberal center to the whole ideological spectrum from left to right. In place of a static Cold War, the authors show that intellectual positions responded to changing global and domestic events and that support for American global hegemony was never uniform or complete. The desire for centering truths did not preempt moves toward decentering. As much new scholarship recognizes, such moves increasingly appeared in the late 1950s and early 1960s, setting the stage for the 1960s and beyond. The authors bring new clarity to this last “phase” of the postwar era by showing it to be a composite of cultural “culminations, revivals, and innovations.” With this volume, the 1950s takes its rightful place as a complex and pivotal decade in the history of American thought and culture.

—Dorothy Ross



## Introduction

The lore of American expatriate writers and artists, particularly the “lost generation” of the 1920s, suggests that these sojourners abroad and their sympathizers at home considered the United States woefully provincial, far distant from the great centers of thought and culture believed to lie in Berlin, Paris, London, or Rome. Shortly before decamping to Paris in 1922, the young writer Harold Stearns wrote, “The most moving and pathetic fact in the social life of America today is emotional and aesthetic starvation . . . We have no heritages or traditions to which to cling except those that have already withered in our hands and turned to dust.” Such disparaging views were neither universal among American thinkers, scholars, or artists nor entirely true even of the expatriates. Yet the “provincial” anxiety was common enough among self-consciously modern, estranged intellectuals that a contrary mood emerging in the years after World War II marked a significant reorientation. Writing in 1952, the distinguished Columbia University historian Jacques Barzun argued, that the United States, “having won a war on both her oceans, and finding herself involved in the four quarters of the earth . . . was quite simply *the* world power, which means: the center of world awareness: it was Europe that was provincial.”<sup>1</sup>

The ascent of the United States to a posture of unparalleled economic, political, and military power in the world—something foreshadowed in the wake of World War I and made unmistakable by the late 1940s—did not

necessarily elevate American thought and culture to the “center of world awareness,” though it certainly boosted the world influence borne by American arts, letters, and sciences in the following years. Nor did American hegemony at midcentury lead to the uncritical “great American celebration” that the dissenting sociologist C. Wright Mills complained of in the late 1950s as the mark of Cold War complacency; however subdued social and political criticism appeared to be, Mills’s very complaint served to fracture the supposed unanimity of American self-approval. Rather, what characterized most but surely not all of American thought and culture in the mid-twentieth century, from roughly 1948 through 1963, was a preoccupation with principles that lay “at the center” of things: What defined the essential character of “American culture” as a whole? How could certain fundamental, crucial, and “permanent” standards of human morality be rescued from the flux and the horrors of history? In what ways did a stable “self” at the core of personality emerge through the human life cycle? What basic principles distinguish the scientific method, securing truth or validity from error, illusion, or myth? Which rights can all nations and cultures agree are universal? Are there key elements to democracy, to the integrity of a society, to order in the world? Such questions—though there were many competing answers to them—were the sort that drew the attention of many, but again not all, thinkers and culture creators. Centers may not hold; wholes might dissolve. The quest may not be worth the candle; better to get outside the circle—literally go eccentric—than find what held things together. If there was a predominant tone or style to American thought and culture in the mid-twentieth century, what we call an inclination to “centering,” there was also a significant undertow running in a different direction.

We understand “centering” as a style or pattern of thought emerging in many different disciplines and modes of cultural expression. It can be recognized in various impulses that, though not shared by all, put a priority on reaffirming universality, grasping essential principles, confirming foundational beliefs, identifying forces that make societies whole, creating synthesis in place of dispersion or disarray—in sum, rendering experience something stable, balanced, whole, and focused on commonly recognized realities. Such dispositions contrast with those of times both before and after the midcentury. What philosopher Morton White called the “revolt against formalism,” ushering in the critical thought of figures like John Dewey, Thorstein Veblen, and Charles Beard in the early twentieth century, dethroned the ideal norms assumed to govern whole provinces of human behavior and natural phenomena. That revolt prioritized instead empirical multiplicity, cultural pluralism, a measure of relativism, and epistemological uncertainty. What

followed the midcentury period, toward the end of the twentieth century, differed too. An expectation of disturbance, a fascination with what appeared off-kilter, the primacy of disaggregating apparent wholes, in sum a preference for decentering: These dispositions, while of course not unknown in the midcentury years, would loom much larger thereafter.

Centering discourses, by the way, are not necessarily “conservative” aspirations; they could just as well chart out paths of social and cultural criticism. “The root is man,” the critic Dwight Macdonald announced in 1946, seeking to rebuild a political left that was centered on transhistorical, radical-humanist principles of preserving life, pursuing justice, practicing freedom, fashioning community, embracing equality, and securing peace. In an entirely different register, dealing with very distinct concerns, Thomas Kuhn wrote in 1962 that every science, in its “normal” pursuits, rested on a common “unit” or “paradigm” of “intellectual tools” shared by its practitioners as a consequence of their institutionalized training. In many domains, and from many different perspectives, inquiry sought to drive to the heart of the matter. One sign of the 1950s, historian Carl Degler remarked, was the rededication of psychologists and anthropologists to go “in search of human nature.” The novelist Ralph Ellison paradoxically has his “invisible man,” hiding in an unsuspected underground shelter, suggest to his generic reader “that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you.” In 1963, Betty Friedan boiled down the discontents of American women to “the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary culture,” a feminine mystique rooted in “Occupation: housewife.”<sup>2</sup> At the same time, others doubted that the location of such essential roots, the drive toward a commonly shared experience, or the preference for integral wholes were desirable or productive pursuits—a conclusion perhaps already implicit in Friedan’s critical diagnosis, making her something of a transitional figure to the cultural mood that came next.

### Moods at Midcentury

Nineteen forty-eight was the year when the Cold War division of Europe in two was consolidated, when the Marshall Plan for US aid to West European recovery was first broached, when the Czech coup dispelled hopes for an inclusive left taking power in Eastern Europe, and when the first great crisis over Berlin—marked by the US-led “airlift” of supplies into blockaded West Berlin—suggested the possibility that repeated political confrontations could tip toward outright war. During that year, too, the postwar division of Korea into two occupation zones was transformed into a confrontation of two ostensibly sovereign governments, the Soviet-backed Democratic

People's Republic in the north, whose leaders had spearheaded opposition to Japan's colonial domination of the peninsula, and the US-backed Republic of Korea in the south led by Japan's former Korean collaborators. Regarding domestic American politics, the socialist writer and organizer Michael Harrington called 1948 "the last year of the 1930s": Henry Wallace's presidential campaign marked the final adventure of the Popular Front, and despite Harry Truman's campaign promises of a Fair Deal, it soon became apparent that significant moves to extend social welfare legislation had stalled. Furious campaigns to uncover and crush Communist influence in American life, which we know as the Red Scare, entered a new phase. In 1948, the first public accusations emerged of Communist spying inside organs of the federal government, highlighted by charges against former State Department official Alger Hiss; at the same time, the Justice Department indicted the top leaders of the Communist Party under the provisions of the antiseditious Smith Act. The years 1945 to 1948 may be counted as the "aftermath" of war; beyond 1948, a different setting of social, political, and cultural life emerged.

That is not to say, of course, that the memory and effects of the world war itself had been surpassed or subdued in this new period. That war, the next one (Korea), plus the real threat of nuclear war: all these combined with the "cold war" of Soviet-American rivalry to loom over the American midcentury like an inescapable reminder of horrific mass violence. Although victory in 1945 brought jubilation and the equally real sense of the possibility for creating a "better world" in its wake, unthinking conviction in the virtues of "the good war" against Germany and Japan or of "the greatest generation" had not yet taken hold. Like many other war novels of the time, veteran Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, published in 1948 when the author was twenty-five years old, dwelled on misery and the grotesque in a combat zone ruled by death, the despotism of commanders, raging resentment, and the crushing of one's personal, human integrity. In Mailer's view, the ethnic diversity of the army experience—which did contribute to a more inclusive sense of American nationality—was accompanied by a newly hardened militarism, wedded to persistent racist norms, authoritarian hierarchy, crass careerism, and blood lust. In all that, the novelist perceived the possible incubus of a postwar American fascism. At the very least, Mailer captured the gross brutality on both sides of the Pacific war.

The specter of monumental violence in its varied forms of blitzkrieg, siege, incendiary and atomic bombs, genocide, and racist terror hung over the entire midcentury period. A deep hunger for peace and security answered it,

also expressed in various ways. Mainstream political leaders at least paid lip service to hopes for a new world of international collaboration. Small bands of dissenters offered a new brand of radical pacifism they deemed the distinctive form of dissent especially suited to their times. Others, in a desperate mood colored by fears of apocalyptic human annihilation, retreated from contentious politics to personal life. And that retreat, in turn, excited concern about “apathy” and “conformity”—terms mentioned so often by contemporary observers that they have come to be identified with those years. Preoccupation with “the apathetic Fifties” stemmed partly from worry that in conformism and dissociation from public life lay the germs of totalitarianism, something that was not aberrant but endemic within modern life.

For all the talk about apathy and conformity, the resources of dissent and cultural critique in those years were not inconsiderable. Both the apocalyptic and the countertotalitarian dispositions that hung over from the war infused Allen Ginsberg’s poem *Howl* of 1955, as he denounced (by a biblical reference to a child-devouring idol) the horrors of his own time, identified as “Moloch the vast stone of war” and “Moloch the incomprehensible prison.” In a more muted style, Shirley Jackson’s 1948 story of human sacrifice in a New England town, “The Lottery,” likewise reflected a great fear, as one reviewer put it, of “mass sadism.” Jackson’s story was reprinted regularly for years afterward.<sup>3</sup>

Horror of war and the totalitarian menace helped spawn one of the characteristic strains of midcentury thought and culture, a move to discover or restore some cognitive and ethical universals capable of checking or countering the worst of human behavior. Appalled by the record of a global war killing fifty million people, some 65 percent of whom were civilians, a significant cohort of postwar intellectuals developed “a multifaceted program for epistemological and normative reconstruction,” as the scholar Ira Katznelson has written about his own education in history and political science at midcentury: rather than concluding the worst about modernity, these thinkers “sought to discover resources within the Enlightenment to recognize complexity and danger without quitting expectations for a less cruel world.”<sup>4</sup> Others, more thoroughly disenchanted with modern ways they believed had instigated rampant vice and violence, sought grounding for human virtues elsewhere, perhaps in ancient wisdom regarding “the permanent concerns of mankind,” as Allan Bloom, a champion of classical Greek philosophy, would put it later. A wide range of such intellectual pursuits in search of core principles—notwithstanding the lack of consensus on what such principles might be—count as efforts to find a “center” of experience, a stable place to stand in the moral universe and the world of affairs. Thus, writing in retrospect of the midcentury years, historian



of American religion Martin Marty noted in his field the flourishing of terms like “consensus, dialogue, ecumenism, interfaith, church unity, integration, collegiality, conciliarism, merger.”<sup>5</sup> A strong caution is necessary here: acknowledging the currency of these trends hardly means that “consensus” in the sense of broad, common agreement on basics actually prevailed across the great span of American society and culture during these years. Nor does highlighting the preoccupation with “centers” imply our embrace of Arthur Schlesinger Jr.’s proposition in his 1949 book, *The Vital Center*, that the golden mean of public life could be found in the middle of the political spectrum. “Consensus” in knowledge and norms was not achieved at midcentury, but for a great deal of intellectual life, it was widely believed that *consensus seeking* marked the path forward.

While the search for a center often reflected an anguished recoil from war and terror, it could also rest on hope, nurtured by a postwar promise of a new start. In 1948, the permanent New York City headquarters of the United Nations was under construction on land donated two years earlier by John D. Rockefeller Jr., to be completed in 1952. In the late 1940s, American intellectuals and administrators who played a prominent role in United Nations agencies such as UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) showed “almost unquestioned optimism” in the capacity of such international collaborations to nurture a pacific and democratic “world community.”<sup>6</sup> UNESCO scientists firmly believed that science itself was the model of a shared, global culture, to be built and perfected out of both necessity and confidence: the threat of atomic warfare, many of them asserted, made world government not “merely a dream . . . [but] a practical problem that we must solve if we are to live.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Lewis Mumford’s 1944 book, titled in essentialist and universal terms *The Condition of Man*, insisted on a standard of wholeness in which “no one part of life should be segregated from another part,” applied to the balanced personality as well as to a genuinely egalitarian and inclusive society.<sup>8</sup> Scalable visions of holistic order at the level of the individual, the local community, the national, and the global thus figured as a component of that midcentury intellectual penchant toward “centered” modes of thought and experience. And yet at the same time, a vision of coherent wholes could signal for someone like Mumford a critique of militarism and yearning for peace even as it aroused in others fear of stifling containment.

Neither fear and foreboding on the one hand nor aspirations for a brand-new world on the other exhausted the mingled moods of the midcentury years. Recovery from depression and war also encouraged, more simply, a

move toward revaluing the “normal” or “ordinary” run of personal development, family, neighborhood, schooling, and more. For that matter, the mobilization of the country for the sake of fighting the Cold War demanded stout hearts and national solidarity rather than aggrieved misgivings about the American way of life. Simultaneously, the onset of a “long boom” of prosperity, based in the war-fueled dynamism of the US economy and the country’s privileged standing in the world market, went a long way toward restoring confidence in the promises of modernity. Against all evidence of destruction and despair, modernity could still remain the mold of a society and culture geared to admirable trends: the advance of science, reason conquering superstition, technologies providing convenience and well-being, the concentration and movement of people in masses, and large-scale organization assuring efficiency and order.

Stemming from all these varied impulses, the notion prevailed that shared standards or normative measures could be clearly identified—normative, that is, in both senses of prescribing values and defining the typical. Hence, as part of the “centering” style we see also a penchant for defining types, each accompanied by the definite article. It is evident in such early landmark works as *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) and persisted well into the 1960s as psychologists and allied researchers sought to define such things as “the creative personality” or “the open mind.” Historian Samuel W. Franklin has pointed out that the notion of “creativity” as a distinguishable trait or capacity was virtually invented by psychologists circa 1950 and blossomed by the late 1950s in research projects fueled by post-*Sputnik* campaigns to locate those showing a talent for innovation. Thus, in 1958, Rockefeller Fund officer John Gardner argued in terms rife with centered subjects, “Paradoxical though it may seem, society as a whole must come to the aid of the individual—finding ways to identify him as a unique person, and to place him alongside his fellow men in ways which will not inhibit or destroy his individuality.” For its pursuers, the creative personality shared traits with the democratic personality, a type supposedly the answer to the authoritarian. Before long, however, critics in psychological research complained that “no single definition [of creativity] has yet been prepared that suits all workers in the field,” and the notion of an identifiable type began to crumble.<sup>9</sup> Similar pursuits in this period aimed to define the very nature and essence of “rationality” (at the birth of the “decision sciences”) or “the scientific method”; these too came to appear, over time, as very elusive objects indeed. Centered things often dissolved on close inspection.

Just as “centers” might prove elusive to those who sought them, others recoiled from or actively resisted “centering” modes, wishing instead to

disperse or dissolve wholes and boundaries. One work of art could challenge “centered” modes in one respect and replicate them in another. The eccentric (literally “off-center”), Dionysian impulses of Beat poets such as Ginsberg paradoxically aimed also at a kind of transcendence that was mystical and whole; thus Ginsberg hailed those “who threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot for Eternity outside of Time” and “who fell on their knees in hopeless cathedrals praying for each other’s salvation and light.” Other writers and artists dwelled on the dislocated character of experience or tried to *un-focus* attention, as in Jackson Pollock’s “all-over” large canvases, which invited the eye to wander over the entire plane, or in the first “Happenings,” where multiple performances in different media coincided in time with little attempt to harmonize them rhythmically or otherwise. Such play on multiple and diverse levels could both distract and heighten perception of one’s surroundings.

All these moods, dispositions, and styles prevailed at midcentury, a period lasting roughly to 1963, when a number of social, cultural, and political shocks—the high pitch of civil rights activism, new rising styles of protest militancy and cultural disaffection, the worsening prospects for US policy in South Vietnam, the assassination of John Kennedy—helped shift the terms of experience toward a different complex, one more given to decentering. This configuration of a midcentury period stands not as a “long 1950s” but as an alternative to that historiography of “the Fifties” that is founded on a stale consensus/conflict model: in that mode, a single decade is first imagined as one of stasis and conformity; then, critics bend back the other way and see the period full of change. Surely, both interpretations apply; like other historical periods—perhaps more so—the mid-twentieth century bore signs of paradox and irony.

### Equipoise and Anxiety

The very coexistence of dread and buoyant confidence, the combined trauma of war and a reinvestment afterward in the renewed promises of modernity, made these years both an “age of equipoise,” as George Stocking Jr. once described the different time and place of mid-nineteenth-century England, and an “age of anxiety” betraying acute troubles of the human spirit. Stocking pinned the sense of “equipoise” on that moment in 1851, when the great world’s fair held near London in the Crystal Palace celebrated “Peace, Abundance and Prosperity” afforded by the wonders of machine production and the expansion of world trade that Great Britain bequeathed (so pros-

perous Britons claimed) to all humanity. It was a time, Stocking suggested, when worldly affairs, at least in Britain, seemed so nicely balanced between change and stability that one might engage in untroubled contemplation of the stages of progress various nations and peoples were traversing, each at its own pace. It was an age when the British middle and upper classes felt so secure in their own good fortune, so unthreatened by foreign opponents or subaltern discontents, that they took pride in an achievement apparently open to all—or at least all who appreciated the example set by themselves. It was of course a passing moment, coming *after* the radical Chartist movement had been effectively suppressed and *before* the Indian “mutiny” of 1857 sparked a harder-edged racism, wedded to armed force, that sustained imperial rule over the darker peoples of the Indian subcontinent and other colonized regions to come.<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, for the United States in the mid-twentieth century, bygone rivals like Germany and Japan lay prostrate and the new rival, the Soviet Union, was held in check. As in Britain’s age of equipoise, any internal challenge from below had been subdued: old agrarian resentment of city-based banks had receded into the distant past of nineteenth-century Populism, while working-class challenges to business power had—very recently—been contained. A truce achieved by 1950 in contract bargaining between management and industrial unions made worker rebellion impossible and any further, threatening gains in labor power unlikely. Peace at home and supremacy abroad signaled an epochal achievement for the powers at the helm of the American capitalist order, and the rapid growth in popular purchasing power (real income for working Americans increased by a third over the fifteen years we consider in this book) made at least a defensible case for the beneficence of “The American Way of Life.”

Despite all that, a contrary note had been sounded at the very beginning of the midcentury period. In 1947, the English poet W. H. Auden (who had become a US citizen the prior year) published a book-length poem, *The Age of Anxiety*, whose title struck quite a few readers as the appropriate name for their time. It was a “difficult” modernist work, ostensibly concerning a chance meeting in a New York City bar of four unconnected people during wartime—a medical officer in the Canadian Air Force on leave (the stand-in for Auden himself); a widower and self-educated shipping clerk of Irish heritage; a young Jewish woman named Rosetta, well paid as a department store buyer; and a young navy man, nervous about his future despite the fact that he was “fully conscious of the attraction of his uniform to both sexes.”<sup>11</sup>

Strangers at first, they fall into conversation, making a “rare community” that ponders (alluding to Shakespeare) the “seven ages” of human growth and the “seven stages” of a search for salvation. As they embark on their imaginative journey, Rosetta remarks:

The knowledge needed is not special,  
 The sole essential a sad unrest  
 Which no life can lack. Long is the way  
 Of the Seven Stages, slow the going,  
 And few, may be, are faithful to the end,  
 But all start out with the hope of success . . .  
 Mute or maddening through the Maze of Time,  
 Seek its centre, desiring like us  
 The Quiet Kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

Describing the achievement of salvation as arrival at the “center” evoked a keynote of the time. More specifically, Auden’s search for a center reflected his new preoccupation, displacing his earlier left-wing hopes for social change (he had served the left-wing forces in the Spanish Civil War in a noncombat role) with religious and mythic themes. Rosetta’s character was based on a Jewish woman with whom the poet had had a passing love affair. Auden’s philosemitism led him to recognize the Jewish understanding of redemption to be “the power to endure the suffering of waiting.” So Rosetta says: “Time is our trade, to be tense our gift”—and such tension of always “waiting” is precisely the meaning Auden gave to “anxiety”—which meant the suspension of any certainty of achieving fulfillment in real, earthly time.<sup>13</sup> Auden’s “anxious” longing for a “center” echoed in other works of the time. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. began *The Vital Center* with a chapter titled “Politics in the Age of Anxiety.” According to his definition, “The twentieth century has at least relieved us of the illusion that progress is inevitable. This age is straining all the capacities of man. At best, it is an age of transition; at worst, an age of catastrophe.”<sup>14</sup> In another place, referring to a coming ecological crisis and reprising a characteristic move of midcentury toward regrouping or centering human values, Schlesinger saw the “epic struggle” of his time as one to “restore man to his foundations in nature.”<sup>15</sup>

Equipose and anxiety coexisted always in weird mixtures. Schlesinger’s perfervid rhetoric stemmed from his polemical purpose—to combat Henry Wallace’s Progressive Party campaign, a task already completed when the book appeared in print. The dark hours of the Red Scare from 1950 to 1954, more or less corresponding to the Korean War, would brighten a bit with the Senate’s censure of Joseph McCarthy; thereafter, many Americans associated

a sense of calm and equanimity with the person of Dwight Eisenhower. With Stalin dead, the Korean armistice concluded, the Geneva Accords suggesting (misleadingly) a settlement in Indochina, and the diminution of tensions in Europe signaled by the 1955 East-West agreement to neutralize Austria, some relief from agonistic world relations encouraged observers to see an emerging political balance. The liberal anticommunist intellectuals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, who first convened in Berlin as news of the Korean War broke in 1950, now reconvened in 1955 to welcome what several of its key voices considered an “end of ideology,” a supposed concord on principles of the modern welfare state in the West and perhaps a growing “convergence” between the West and the Soviet bloc as both sides confronted the administrative problems of mature “industrial society.” At home, the Right’s hunt for Communist infiltrators eased somewhat while, on the other side of the political spectrum, fears of a coming American fascism in McCarthyite guise receded as well. Soon cultural criticism would refocus itself, concerned less with the totalitarian threat posed by mass political hysteria and more with the supposed “complacency” of a fat, sluggish society. Poet Robert Lowell bemoaned “the tranquilized *Fifties*,” a line he wrote appropriately in the year 1957, when the gap between the end of the Red Scare and the beginning of “the Sixties” might have seemed to signal a time of doldrums.<sup>16</sup>

Such impressions of a stifling consensus, due less to McCarthyite repression than to mass contentment, failed to register events emerging immediately in that mid-decade juncture. The Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, announced May 17, 1954, and followed by the court’s implementation order of May 31, 1955, stirred the racist rebellion of southern white officials known as “massive resistance.” Then the unpunished murder of Chicago teenager Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi, on August 28, 1955, provoked such outrage among African Americans that the stage was set for an organized civil rights protest, beginning shortly in the thirteen-month-long Montgomery bus boycott of 1955 to 1956. Other signs of dissent followed, reawakening the cause for peace: descendants of postwar radical pacifism, led by Reverend A. J. Muste and the radical Catholic Dorothy Day, challenged New York City’s civil defense drills that they viewed as government exercises intended to acclimate Americans to the threat of nuclear war. Elsewhere, their pacifist comrades courted arrest by trespassing on nuclear testing grounds; remnants of world federalism reappeared as the disarmament group, SANE (or the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy), founded in 1957. Popular culture showed a tentative revival of social criticism in movies such as *Three Brave Men* (1956), a modest protest against Red-baiting, and the more hard-hitting antiwar movie, *Paths of Glory* (1957),

which depicts a French soldiers' mutiny in World War I and the executions carried out against three of their number.

Nonetheless, in 1957, journalists Stewart and Joseph Alsop toured the country and reported that Americans seemed to hold "unquestioning confidence in the American future."<sup>17</sup> That confidence would hold into the early or mid-1960s, notwithstanding mounting critiques and social struggles. The narrow election victory of John Kennedy in 1960 has been credited with commencing a new age of youthful energy, dissent, and social activism, but despite the Democrats' glee at returning to the White House, little in Kennedy's record justified that legend. Kennedy came to office determined to fight the Cold War more vigorously, he asserted, than Eisenhower's budgetary restraint had allowed. Historians today generally recognize that his aspirations to stand as heroic leader of the "Free World" far outstripped his interest in domestic policy. Formally committed to the civil rights liberalism identified with his predecessor Harry Truman, Kennedy actually temporized on the issue due to his fear of alienating white southern Democrats and his hope that black activists would not get out of hand.<sup>18</sup> Yet the brash confidence Kennedy conveyed was in fact of a piece with the popular mood the Alsops encountered in the late 1950s. The administration's embrace of "modernization" theory as the key to winning over the world's postcolonial states by promoting economic development was another sign of the midcentury's investment in the supremacy of "the West." If one looks for a historical break in the midcentury continuum, it lies not in 1960 with Kennedy's election but in the second half of 1963, when Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birmingham campaign finally pushed Kennedy to submit a civil rights bill to Congress; when the Klan-inspired 16th Street Baptist Church bombing following the Birmingham campaign stirred further outrage among militant black activists; and when Cold War policy started to break down in Vietnam with the US-supported coup against Ngo Dinh Diem just three weeks before Kennedy's assassination.

### At the Center

The demonstration of a relatively long midcentury period having its own uneven tempo of development challenges facile distinctions between "the Fifties" and "the Sixties." In the transition from the one decade to the next, we are accustomed to think, American life passed from a time of placidity to one of turbulence, from complacency to dissent, from consensus to conflict, and from behavioral conformity to the virtues or vices of individual liberation.

Some have celebrated this apparent transformation as a necessary change, which helped undermine oppressive racial and sexual hierarchies, challenge the unearned authority of experts, and question the aura surrounding those holding social and political power. Others have lamented America's subsequent "unraveling," due to the confusion and excess that accompanied the erosion of strong foundations for social stability. Either way—viewing the 1950s as a "dark age" or "proud decade"—historians and other observers have generally viewed the decade as a period noteworthy for its holism. Things hung together, before they fell apart.

Over the past two decades, however, historians have documented the variations and unsettledness of experience, as well as persistent dissent and agitation that actually marked the 1950s in the United States. They have noted not only the depth of the growing black freedom struggle and hints of women's emancipation underlying the seeming consensus on domesticity but also the presence of sexual rebellion, pacifism, avant-garde aesthetics, and other forms of nonconformity. Signs of strain appeared not merely at the margins but in the mainstream of American life. In her rereading of 1950s women's magazines, for instance, Joanne Meyerowitz has shown how popular ideology operated in different registers, celebrating domesticity at one moment and independent women who broke into new fields of professional and public distinction at another. We have now become accustomed to see "mass culture"—that midcentury critics condemned for homogenizing all it touched—as a field in which different actors, different voices, and divergent messages competed for attention. All this cannot deny the repressive and quiescent notes of the 1950s, however. Barriers and hierarchies of race and sex were painfully, often brutally, real, prevailing alongside new rhetoric of inclusion and harmony. The times witnessed the exercise of US military might in the world at large and the "mobilization" of civil society to support that projection of power, combined with modes of control and exclusion that narrowed the scope and vigor of dissent. The growth of purchasing power in prosperous times—albeit uneven—is well documented, inducing some measure of popular acquiescence to the going system even amid many sources of discontent.

In any case, imagining a sudden shift from complacency to conflict, pivoting on the change in decades, poses the question awry. We look instead at a somewhat more extended span of time: a midcentury era setting in as postwar conditions of US hegemony, renewed economic growth, Cold War antagonism, and the beginnings of worldwide decolonization converged to create a new scene beginning in the late 1940s. That framework included plentiful



sources of geopolitical, social, and political turbulence, all of it barely kept under control until a new set of convergent developments—the crest of civil rights agitation in the United States, ongoing decolonization abroad, and the increasingly evident calamity of the US venture in Vietnam—revealed all the cracks in the midcentury order. Over the course of that midcentury period, the awful memory of World War II and fear of a third combined awkwardly with confidence in global reconstruction under US leadership. The mixed moods of midcentury hung on horrors of war and totalitarianism that shed disgrace on the record of modern life in “the West,” *plus* a powerful reinvestment in the promises of modernity—economic development, scientific advance, political stability, the widening of freedom, equality, and security—that we might call a syndrome of “modernity reloaded.” Hence the odd conjunction of equipoise and anxiety, disenchantment and renewal, trepidation and aspiration that characterized midcentury American thought and culture. Potent drives to discover “centered” phenomena, elaborate essential principles, restore ethical foundations, and view things in whole, rounded terms characterized the time. Frustration with the pursuit of centered experience and even a distaste for that which was formed, orderly, and reduced to essentials were also evident over the course of the midcentury. Centering and recoil against centering gave the period its unique cultural dynamic.

Such are the currents and crosscurrents this volume explores; its chapters treat a few key foci where these complications became evident. Chapter 1 recounts the drift in intellectual life toward embracing American hegemony after initial, fairly widespread reservations about the triumph of an “American Century.” Chapter 2 addresses one salient venture to define things “at the center”: the urgent attention that writers gave to identifying a distinctive “American” (national) culture. Chapter 3 surveys the ways thinkers of all sorts took their distance from *history* (in its emphases either on changefulness or on its presumed determinism) as they probed “the permanent concerns of mankind.” Chapter 4 plumbs another locus of centering: the realm of the “self,” which (it seemed) could be found or lost, real or inauthentic, grounded or unstable, rigid or flexibly balanced. The very tendency of the period to speak of singular wholes, such as “America” or of particular groups named in the singular as a quasi-national “type” (“the Negro,” “the Mexican American”), references to one gender or another or to a single standard of “normal” (and its antithesis, “abnormality”): all these invite discussion, in chapter 5, of how inclusion and exclusion, conflict and collaboration, and open or covert boundary-crossing operated at midcentury. Chapter 6 considers the “new modernism” that took wing in these years despite the conventional view of the time that artistic modernism had lost its critical edge and already lay

exhausted; instead, the new modernists fashioned avant-garde approaches that started to crack centered versions of experience. Chapter 7 approaches the converse of the new status of the United States “at the center” of world affairs: how Americans viewed the wider world, began to think globally, and faced the turbulent unfolding of a postcolonial system of nations. Chapter 8 surveys the intellectual developments at the end of this period that represented, variously, culminations of its spirit and drive, revivals of what had lapsed over that time, and emergent trends that would flourish afterward.



## CHAPTER ONE



# American Hegemony and the New Cosmopolitanism

“The center of gravity and the ultimate decision must increasingly lie in America.” So stated *The Economist* in an editorial quoted by Henry Luce in his famous era-naming essay of 1941, “The American Century.”<sup>1</sup> A decade later, in 1950, Paul H. Nitze, director of the Policy Planning Staff within the US Department of State, echoed that verdict in his call for a rapid military build-up to establish “strength at the center” of the “free world,” that is, in the United States as it confronted the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Luce’s dramatic statement, originally published in *Life* magazine, was a call for the United States to join Britain’s cause in World War II. US commitment to that cause, he wrote, should be premised not on “majestic words” such as devotion to “democracy,” “freedom,” or “justice.” Rather, it would mean simply that Americans accepted “wholeheartedly our duty and our opportunity as the most powerful and vital nation in the world and in consequence to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit.”<sup>3</sup> The language of “the center” ran through Luce’s text: he saw “America as the dynamic center of ever-widening spheres of enterprise, America as the training center of the skillful servants of mankind.” He remarked, furthermore, that in the twentieth century, “our world . . . is for the first time in history one world, fundamentally indivisible,” and as the United States was willing “to assume the leadership of the world,” the “world of the 20th century . . . must be to a significant degree an American Century.”<sup>4</sup> Perhaps there is no more salient and significant fact about American thought and culture in the mid-twentieth century than this newfound

consciousness of global centrality, whether it followed Luce's vision or some other American approach to the wider world.

Writing in 1941, Luce did not foresee the postwar bipolar world, for he did not describe a contest with the Soviet Union as a rival superpower. The German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was still in effect, and the countries he named at war were Germany and Britain (and an already defeated France). He laid emphasis, however, on the role "for America and for America alone to determine whether a system of free economic enterprise . . . shall or shall not prevail in this century," and so it can be assumed that his vision was in principle anticommunist well before the Cold War was in full swing. That "system of free economic enterprise," he claimed, was capable of providing for all the world's peoples based on the United States playing a "Good Samaritan" role: American power would be globally beneficent. Yet in his peroration, Luce wrote a curious inversion of Abraham Lincoln's great definition of the United States, "conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Luce's rhetoric recalled Theodore Roosevelt's expansionism more than Lincoln's egalitarianism: "This nation, conceived in adventure and dedicated to the progress of man . . . cannot truly endure unless there courses through its veins from Maine to California the blood of purpose and enterprise and high resolve."<sup>5</sup>

The common embrace of Luce's phrase at midcentury was a curious development. First, the warfare/welfare state that actually came into being by the end of the 1940s did not conform precisely to Luce's vision of American power. Truman Democrats advanced a "guns and butter" welfarism at odds with Luce's antipathy toward the New Deal. And though his essay appeared innocent of the Cold War to come, once that struggle was in play, Luce led the troops of the so-called China Lobby, harassing the Truman administration for the "loss" of China to Communism in 1949 and promoting the "rollback" of Communism in place of Truman's "containment" policy. In other words, a Truman-led American Century differed significantly from Luce's. Second, widespread acceptance of a strong-state Cold War mobilization, pinned on a global vision of "strength at the center," signaled a major shift among liberal internationalists, many of whom had, back in 1941, derided Luce's vision for the imperialist inclinations they saw in it. That shift—how the reluctance of World War II interventionists to adopt Luce's conception of US ascendancy gave way to an embrace of Cold War "strength at the center"—is an important story to tell of midcentury American thought and culture.

Any explanation of how that shift in liberal opinion took shape must account for another dimension of the midcentury sensibility: namely, the grief, horror, and disenchantment occasioned by the unparalleled mass violence

of World War II and the fearsome “totalitarian” politics bound up with it. Superficially, the move of predominant opinion by 1948 toward embracing a posture of US world hegemony implied a consensus on one proposition: only by steeling US power in the world, as the guarantor of United Nations peacekeeping and the sole force deterring Soviet aggression, could the continued threat of modern war and terror be subdued. Plumbing midcentury American thought and culture a bit more deeply shows that such a consensus was never complete; completing it would have required suppression of precisely the widespread misgivings about militarism and concentrated power that the experience of the 1930s and World War II bequeathed to the postwar world. Those misgivings entailed widespread reconsideration of the promises of human progress. Critics refused to absolve American society of the modern curses of organized violence, hatred, domination, and coercion. Although subdued in public discourse by the time the midcentury period of 1948 to 1963 began, those worries and criticisms never disappeared.

### **Embracing Hegemony (and the Persistence of Countervisions)**

The controversy that Luce’s “American Century” initially aroused was largely forgotten as the phrase assumed the status of common sense in describing US world power in the third quarter of the twentieth century. When first published in early 1941, Luce’s article joined the debate that was still intense over whether the United States ought to get “in” a war that was already eighteen months old. The neutrality acts passed by Congress and signed by President Roosevelt from 1935 to 1939 reflected a widespread disinclination by Americans to get entangled once again in European power politics or in any “foreign war.” That sentiment ran across the political spectrum and affected even Wilsonians like Franklin Roosevelt who for much of the interwar period had found it politically useful to temper their “internationalist” impulses. The last renewal of the Neutrality Act, in 1939, however, had a number of provisions that opened an escape route from its strictures, and by 1940, Roosevelt had clearly adopted an “aid to Britain” and “preparedness” line, which included establishing a military draft. His Republican opponent in the 1940 election, Wendell Willkie, chose not to fight him on that score, despite the strength of the old nationalist, noninterventionist Right within Willkie’s party.

Observers then and since have construed the argument over US engagement in World War II as a debate of “isolationism versus internationalism,” although neither of those terms adequately described the varied political

views within either the anti- or the prointervention camp. Luce, clearly not an isolationist, was not quite an “internationalist” either, for he argued for intervention in *nationalist* terms—that is, for going out into the world on terms the United States chose for itself. When Vice President Henry A. Wallace talked of a multilateral world of alliances the United States would join after the war, Clare Boothe Luce, Henry’s wife and Republican representative from Connecticut, denounced Wallace’s views on the floor of the House as naive “globaloney.”<sup>6</sup> Yet although it is tempting to describe the Luce-Wallace difference as one of “unilateral” US power versus “multilateralism,” the rivalry between the two Henrys has been exaggerated.<sup>7</sup> While Wallace’s own visionary statement, *The Century of the Common Man*, struck many of his supporters as a counter to Luce’s mimicry of Pax Britannica, Wallace corresponded cordially with Luce, claiming their aspirations for US power were largely consistent.<sup>8</sup> Conflicts between the two would certainly emerge in later years; initially, however, it was fellow Republican Wendell Willkie, in his famous 1942 diplomatic tour and subsequent book titled *One World*, who most represented the “globaloney” Clare Boothe Luce held in contempt.

Even Franklin Roosevelt proved less invested in multilateralism than conventional histories of foreign relations suggest. He pursued the goal of building the United Nations for a peaceful postwar world, but American diplomats made sure to construct the UN in ways that assured virtually unhampered US authority within it.<sup>9</sup> In effect, the idea of the United States as the balance wheel of global order was no less Roosevelt’s than Luce’s. In describing the role the United States would come to play in the world, both would at appropriate times express their antipathy toward the “old” colonialism of the nineteenth-century great powers, but that did not detract from their imagination of US hegemony.

Although consensus on the coming of world power prevailed in the leading circles, debate in the wider arena of intellectual life was real and sharp. In winter 1942–1943, the conventionally liberal Harvard anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn showed his friends a “manifesto” he had written, “A Declaration of Interdependence: A Creed for Americans as World Citizens.” Even as he joined with Harvard colleagues to foster “national morale” for the war effort, Kluckhohn, a cultural pluralist in the vein of Franz Boas, looked forward to a world where peoples could “live according to their own values and traditions.” He denounced Luce’s worldview as “a frightened retreat to some single standard” and his program as “imperialistic American domination of the world.” Like Margaret Mead and other Boasians who challenged a monistic definition of culture, Kluckhohn encouraged Americans to embrace a world built on “orchestrated heterogeneity.”<sup>10</sup> This was an anthropologist’s version

of the attacks on Luce launched by liberal journalists such as Freda Kirchwey at the *Nation*, who saw “a new brand of imperialism . . . fast gaining favor in this country.” Max Lerner, although less censorious of Luce, wrote that the publisher sought “to establish . . . hegemony in the world, control the world sea lanes and world trade” at the behest of “a new capitalist-conscious group . . . who do not fear war but regard it as an opportunity.”<sup>11</sup> Liberals closer to Roosevelt, such as Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish and playwright Robert Sherwood, a Roosevelt speechwriter, embraced Luce’s vision.

Within the policy-planning committees of the State Department, the geographer Isaiah Bowman, in younger days an aide to Woodrow Wilson at Versailles, formulated visions of a US-fashioned global order after the war: “No line can be established anywhere in the world that confines the interests of the United States because no line can prevent the remote from becoming the near danger.” Bowman did not mean merely that the world was so interknit that shock waves from a disturbance anywhere spread everywhere. He had a keen sense that the economic prerequisite for US strength lay in an open world market, and he borrowed the German concept of *Lebensraum*, the notorious notion of “living space” that required German territorial expansion, claiming that “*Lebensraum* for all is the answer to [Hitler’s] *Lebensraum* for one.” He had no doubt that such global *Lebensraum* required the exercise of US power through the varied institutions the United States would come to lead: the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

As an influential member of the US delegation to the founding UN meeting in San Francisco, April 1945, and close advisor to Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, Bowman sought to check Soviet power and influence.<sup>12</sup> Many other policymakers and advisers in Roosevelt’s war administration shared Bowman’s suspicion of the Soviets.

Nonetheless, the wartime alliance with Russia encouraged a substantial effort in the United States to publicize the growth of “friendship” between the two countries. Wendell Willkie’s two-month round-the-world tour in 1942, endorsed by Roosevelt, was part of those efforts. Willkie hopped across North Africa, the Middle East, Russia, and China, meeting with Stalin as well as Charles De Gaulle, the shah of Iran, and Madame Chiang Kai-shek—emphasizing encounters with “ordinary people” all along the way. Willkie aimed to foster “world goodwill” and “neighborliness,” people to people, and offered a vision defined simply by his 1943 book about the tour, *One World*. It was, historian Samuel Zipp writes, “The foremost episode in the literary and cultural history of wartime globalism.”<sup>13</sup> In homespun diction, Willkie found analogies everywhere to “American” dispositions: the “plain people”



he talked to in Russia and Chiang Kai-shek's China showed the same determination to build their countries as pioneer settlers had shown across the American West in the nineteenth century. Ordinary bonds of neighborliness and common effort were indispensable in a new world of "interdependence" and democratic equality of all nations. So he argued in a frank, anticolonial vein: "Men and women all over the world are on the march, physically, intellectually, and spiritually. . . . Old fears no longer frighten them. . . . They are no longer willing to be Eastern slaves for Western profits. The big house on the hill surrounded by mud huts has lost its awesome charm."<sup>14</sup> Some correspondents charged Willkie with naïve, insufficiently patriotic globaloney, but his synthesis of Americanism and internationalism appealed to a large audience, making *One World* a huge best seller. He was assisted in his speeches and writings by the *Herald Tribune's* book review editor, Irita Van Doren, with whom he had a long-running affair, and he enjoyed public acclaim until his death, aged fifty-two, in 1944.

Willkie's popular brand of global benevolence persisted as US-Soviet tensions mounted through 1946 and 1947, up to the point when Harry Truman announced the US policy of aiding countries ostensibly threatened by Soviet-sponsored subversion—which became known as the "Truman Doctrine" of "containment." Diplomat George Kennan had coined the latter term in a "long telegram" sent in February 1946 from the US embassy in Moscow and later turned into an unsigned July 1947 essay, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," in *Foreign Affairs*, known as the "X article" (for the algebraic byline it carried in the journal). Featuring cautionary reminders of the "appeasement" policies of European governments that failed to halt Nazism in its tracks, "X" argued that US policy "must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies," backed by an undeviating political consensus of all parties, since "exhibitions of indecision, disunity, and internal disintegration within this country have an exhilarating effect on the whole Communist movement." Yet as Truman announced financial and military aid to Greece and Turkey, and followed a week later with commencement of a loyalty oath intended to root out Communists from federal government jobs, even critics within "respectable" circles questioned a headlong rush toward a global, US-led anti-Soviet front.

The same month the president declared the Truman Doctrine, the young journalist and emerging sociologist Daniel Bell condemned the war momentum of the time, arguing that "the political situation between the United States and Russia resembles a paranoid situation where two delusional systems come into conflict," both sides suffering from a militarist fixation and each one sure the other was hell-bent on aggression. Very possibly, he

had heard Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons deliver a paper in Chicago in the fall of 1946, arguing that aggression by individuals, social groups, and nation-states stemmed from certain tensions endemic to “Western societies,” evident in “compulsive masculinity” and military violence, most familiar in the example of Nazi Germany but “common to all the major nations of the Western world”—a syndrome that yielded a “‘paranoid’ pattern of over-readiness to impute hostile intentions where they do not exist, or to exaggerate them grossly where they do. In its extreme form the rest of the world is apt to be seen as mainly preoccupied with plotting to destroy one or one’s group. The Western tendency is to be ‘thin-skinned,’ unable to ‘take it,’ when frustrations must be faced and to place the blame on others when most of it belongs at home.”<sup>15</sup>

The dean of political journalism, Walter Lippmann, shared such skepticism of Truman’s program. Lippmann had sneered at Willkie’s “one-worldism,” a species of “cosmic transcendentalism” he thought threatened to repeat the blunders of Wilson’s diplomacy, stirring “an expectation about things which caused a furious resentment when it didn’t come true.”<sup>16</sup> But Lippmann himself banked on the postwar continuation of collaboration between the “Big Three” wartime allies and harped on the need and feasibility of friendly cooperation with the Soviet Union. Lippmann likewise opposed Truman’s policies as unnecessary provocations that stirred enmity between great powers capable of jointly policing the world. It was Lippmann who became best known for coining the term *the Cold War*, in a critical vein.

Lippmann leveled his critique directly at “Mr. X” in newspaper columns he started publishing in September 1947. Lippmann had no sympathy for Russian communism; he simply doubted that Stalin had aggressive designs on Western Europe and thought the Truman administration, by its provocative moves, was ruining prospects for Soviet-American agreements to unify and pacify all of Europe. From quite different quarters, other voices also deemed the Truman policies unnecessary and unduly provocative: conservative Republican senator Robert Taft—not an “isolationist” but an old skeptic of collective security agreements—reluctantly backed support for Greece and Turkey but later, in 1949, opposed formation of the American Cold War’s European keystone, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>17</sup>

Debate continued into 1948 as the notion of containment contended with a widespread desire for world peace. At the end of the war, the main organization of ecumenical Protestants, the Federal Council of Churches, had also embraced a global vision, calling for “the speediest possible end” of “the imperialism of the white man” (including Puerto Rico as a land to be liberated), a corresponding end to white racism at home in the United

States, “experimentation with various forms of ownership and control, private, cooperative and public,” and a check on national sovereignty in “a duly constituted world government of delegated powers.” This ambitious program obviously stood counter to the Cold War division of the world, so much so that right-wingers called G. Bromley Oxnam, the Methodist bishop leading the ecumenicals, a “prophet of Marxism.”<sup>18</sup>

At this moment, mainstream voices still pooh-poohed such Red-baiting, however. In the popular movie by director Frank Capra, *State of the Union*, released in 1948, the maverick politician Grant Matthews, played by Spencer Tracy and modeled after Willkie (the plot was based on the Willkie–Van Doren affair), repeatedly cited “yakking about Communism” as a phony issue even as he warned that empty stomachs the world over fed the Communist appeal. At a moment intended to represent Matthews’s honesty and integrity, he rejected his campaign manager’s advice to placate big business with promises of low taxes and high tariffs, going further out on a limb than Willkie in challenging the very idea of national sovereignty. In preparing a speech to business leaders, he said,

I’m going to tell them there’s only one government which is capable of handling the atomic control, world disarmament, world employment, world peace, and that’s a world government. The people of thirteen states started the United States of America. Well, I think that the people of that many nations are now ready to start a United States of the World—with or without Russia—and I mean a *United* States of the world, with one Bill of Rights, one international law, one international currency, one international citizenship. And I’m going to tell ’em that the brotherhood of man is not just an idealistic dream but a practical necessity if man is to survive!

Matthews’s remark about Russia was an aside; it suggested the door to collaboration was still open even as it acknowledged Soviet-American tensions. The screenplay was dated September 1947, and the movie premiered in April 1948, playing to large audiences throughout the summer of that election year.

Within a few months, general sentiment would shift rapidly to more of a consensus backing an anticommunist policy of containment (or, alternatively, of “rollback” as the right-wing writer James Burnham proposed). The struggle among intellectuals over foreign policy advanced on several fronts: the 1948 presidential election, particularly the contest between incumbent Democrat Harry Truman and his third-party rival on the left, Henry Wallace, drove a wedge between two camps of liberal, left-leaning intellectuals. Running as the Progressive Party candidate, Wallace claimed the mantle of

Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, adding a strong plank against Jim Crow segregation; most of all, he campaigned in favor of peace with Russia, a position backed strongly by the Communist Party. The campaign borrowed some of Willkie's rhetoric, while Wallace supporters asserted, misleadingly, that it was carrying on Roosevelt's legacy in foreign affairs. Traveling with Wallace during the Progressive Party campaign, left-wing folk singer Pete Seeger sang, "I was at Franklin Roosevelt's side / Just a while before he died / he said, 'One world must come out of World War Two.'"19

Also part of the Wallace contingent were a number of prominent African American writers and artists, including W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Charlotta Bass, long-time editor and publisher of the oldest black newspaper in the West, the *California Eagle*. Du Bois's tumultuous relationship with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), of which he was a key founder, deteriorated further as he continued moving leftward through the 1940s. Having drafted the association's 1946 "Appeal to the World," sent to the United Nations to assail the denial of human rights to blacks in the United States, Du Bois fell out with NAACP leadership over his criticism of Cold War policy and sympathy for the Soviet Union, leading to his resignation in 1948. He was closely allied with Robeson, whose mainstream popularity during the war years dissipated with his avid support for Wallace and the pro-Soviet statements he made while traveling abroad. Also with Robeson was Bass, a Willkie supporter in 1940 who rallied to the Progressives as a peace party in 1948 and ran as its vice presidential candidate in 1952.

On the other side, Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) had emerged in early 1948 precisely to rebut Communist-led third-party ventures. The January 1949 publication of *The Vital Center*, a manifesto by the young historian and ADA spokesman Arthur Schlesinger Jr., signaled the clear emergence of Cold War liberalism. Schlesinger's title referred to a kind of liberalism, he claimed, that rested on the achievements of the New Deal and, chastened by the spectacle of totalitarianism and the threat of an aggressive Russia, sought to "reclaim democratic ideas . . . against both right and left."

Schlesinger considered the "center" between two extremes to be a "fighting faith." He appealed to an audience of liberal and social democratic reformers for a "restoration of radical nerve," aiming to pull them away from any truck with Communist activists. Such appeals had effect: support for Wallace's conciliatory foreign policy leaked away, starting with the February 1948 communist coup in Czechoslovakia and accelerating over the summer as Wallace's reluctance to challenge further Soviet moves in central Europe

made him look like a patsy. The declaration by the United States and its Western allies that they would fuse their occupation zones in the west of Germany to build a new Federal Republic—in the teeth of Soviet opposition—led to the Russians’ quarantine of West Berlin, which stood deep within their eastern zone of occupation. Wallace would not condemn the Soviets, while the successful US-led “Berlin airlift” of supplies defeated the blockade and gave heroic status to Truman’s line. By November, Wallace’s support dwindled to a mere one million votes, less than the returns won by the States’ Rights Party of southern segregationists challenging Truman on his right. With Truman returned to office, the next year brought the creation of NATO, fixing the international Cold War in place.

What had happened to the “Grant Matthews” idealism of 1947? Its legacy endured in a sequence of small activist organizations that attracted a segment of discharged veterans and college students in the late 1940s, including the young Immanuel Wallerstein, later a leading American sociologist. While a student at Columbia, Wallerstein attended local meetings of the American Veterans Committee (AVC), begun by liberal veterans as an alternative to the American Legion. The AVC was racially integrated and promoted black voter registration in the South; it allied with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and campaigned against the Taft-Hartley Act, advocated international control of nuclear energy, called for granting peacekeeping powers to the United Nations, and criticized US policies such as the Truman Doctrine that it deemed militarily provocative.<sup>20</sup> Mostly composed of New Dealers allied with the CIO, the AVC also attracted Communist and Progressive Party activists. The committee grew to one hundred thousand members before splitting apart prior to the 1948 election, as the anticommunist wing aligned with ADA combatted the AVC’s Wallace supporters. Wallerstein watched the acrimony grow, saying later he agreed with the criticisms that each of the rival camps, Communists and anticommunist social democrats, leveled against the other.

Out of the wreckage, Wallerstein discerned another pole of attraction, the World Federalist movement, which had drawn the allegiance of many liberal AVC members who promoted disarmament, sought to check the new superpower division of East and West camps, and advocated decolonization, which they criticized the UN for delaying. United World Federalists (UWF), founded in 1947, became the focus of Wallerstein’s youthful activism. The movement’s roots lay in a heritage of peace advocacy, at least a half-century old, that enrolled activists ranging from radical to ultrarespectable and including morally committed pacifists, elite “arbitrationists” devoted to nurturing international law, and assorted visionaries. An eminent journal-

ist, Clarence Streit, gained public attention on the eve of World War II by promoting a world federation, modeled on the structure of the American union; this was an interwar vision of world peace retooled to anticipate the aftermath of Allied victory. While Federalists could be sharp critics of the United Nations, a mere *international* organization with no *supranational* powers of the sort Federalists advocated, they were far from extreme. They kept their distance from agitators such as Garry Davis, a young veteran from Maine who made headlines by declaring himself a world citizen, renouncing his US citizenship, and denouncing nationalism tout court.

Federalists meant just what their name implied: established nation-states would remain, their citizenship valid, while ceding peacekeeping to a federation of states. At its founding, UWF gained the support of numerous businessmen who were capable of philanthropic largesse and committed to building a campaign focused on elites. UWF quickly became a major national organization, claiming close to fifty thousand members, an annual operating budget of a half million dollars, and the affiliation of public figures such as Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, acclaimed Broadway lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II, and Albert Einstein. Chapters of Student Federalists thrived at scores of colleges and universities, notably Yale, Stanford, the University of Chicago, and Columbia—which alone counted 165 members on campus in 1948.

Norman Cousins, long-time editor of the widely read literary magazine *Saturday Review*, published articles condemning the nuclear arms race, including Lewis Mumford's 1946 "Gentlemen: You Are Mad!" Cousins himself served as president of the international World Federalist Association and published the period-perfect humanist declaration *Who Speaks for Man?* in 1953, advocating nuclear disarmament. Around the same time the UWF coalesced, a related effort, the Committee to Frame a World Constitution, got underway at the University of Chicago under the direction of University president Robert Hutchins and his close associates, the great-books advocate Mortimer Adler and philosopher Richard McKeon, along with other university luminaries such as the anthropologist Robert Redfield.

The Federalists faced the challenge of navigating the shoals of intensifying Cold War politics while trying to maintain their global ideals; in fact, as the world crisis mounted, UWF adapted by gradations to US containment policy—while the Soviets and Communist activists in the United States denounced world federalism as a bourgeois utopia. While UWF attracted some pacifists, its leadership strove to maintain a nonpartisan appeal to the major political parties; its support for supranational agencies capable of restraining military conflicts did not preclude, UWF decided, limited military

expenditures by nations for purposes of defense. Federalists differed among themselves on the question of a peacetime draft in the United States and generally opposed rearmament of West Germany, yet as the first spate of Cold War tensions climaxed in the formation of NATO, UWF supported it with the mildest qualifications. In summer 1950, UWF unreservedly backed the United States in the Korean War.

The shifting currents that waylaid the one-world sentiment of the mid-1940s also exerted a pull on the postwar career of “the First Lady of American liberalism,” Eleanor Roosevelt. An ardent American “internationalist” and initially an advocate of maintaining peaceful relations with the Soviet Union, Roosevelt accepted Harry Truman’s nomination to serve as one of the US delegates to the United Nations; by early 1946, she was chairing the commission that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approved by the General Assembly at the end of 1948. Even as it was hailed for its new, global conception of human dignity across borders, the major powers considered the declaration purely a symbolic venture. Its references to civil and political liberties as well as “social rights” to employment, income, a decent standard of living, social security, and education were, as historian Samuel Moyn has argued, “declaratory” rather than legal. This was no bill enumerating concrete rights that could be enforced by any judicial body, and it provided no grounds for challenging the world’s power holders. Roosevelt herself joined a French delegate in denying that any global human rights ordinance could challenge an imperial power’s governance of its colonies, and she denied her support to the NAACP’s “Appeal to the World” on the grounds that it potentially fed Soviet propaganda. While she opposed the rise of Red Scare hysteria in the United States, she also took her distance from former associates in the Popular Front such as Paul Robeson, joined ADA, and like the UWF backed the United States in Korea. “The prospect,” Moyn writes, “of moving to legally enforce human rights across borders that a few observers still considered a live possibility as late as 1949 was dead by 1950.”<sup>21</sup>

By this point, most liberal writers and academics had fallen into line, and the scope of political diversity in academic affairs was clearly narrowing. Clyde Kluckhohn’s early dissent from Luce’s hegemonic visions had subsided. During World War II, he gained administrative experience working in the Office of War Information, and agreed in 1948 to head Harvard’s new Russian Research Center, where he kept overt criticism of US policy at bay. In the wider intellectual world, challenges to the emerging Cold War orthodoxy tended to evaporate. Longtime left-wing critic Dwight Macdonald announced the closure of his small but potent magazine of dissent, *politics*, in 1949. A former Marxist converted to anarcho-pacifism, he had resisted Cold

War polarization by casting a plague on both houses, Moscow and Washington, but in 1952 he wearily confessed that he came down on the side of the latter. In tones of dispirited retreat, he said, "I Choose the West."

The closing of Macdonald's *politics* in 1949 coincided with intensification of the Cold War that very year. The Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb and the Communist victory in China's civil war stirred alarm among policy planners in the State Department, who called in 1950 for massive increases in US military spending, accomplished with the outbreak of the Korean War in June. Not a few observers feared that crisis would bring on Armageddon, which it did for masses of people on the Korean peninsula. In the few years before North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel in 1950, civil war on the peninsula had already been brutal, as the US-backed regime of Syngman Rhee suppressed left-wing peasant insurgencies in the south at the cost of up to one hundred thousand lives. In the first six months of official hostilities, contending armies swept across the peninsula in see-saw fashion: first the northerners conquering most of the south before they were pushed all the way back nearly to the northern border with China, whereupon the intervention of Chinese troops helped North Korea return to a line of stalemate not far from the original demarcation line. Both northern and southern troops rounded up their political opponents whenever they held hostile territory and killed large numbers of civilians. Bruce Cumings writes, "We are left with the conundrum that the DPRK [the North Korean regime], widely thought to be the worst of Communist states, conducted itself better than did the American ally in Seoul. To kill 30,000 and not 100,000 [civilian captives], though, offers no comfort." Americans sometimes collaborated with South Korean executioners and sometimes restrained them, while US soldiers committed their own atrocities, notably at the village of Nogun-ri, killing hundreds of Korean refugees. Most of the devastation was caused by US bombing raids replete with large-scale use of napalm: US bombing tonnage in Korea almost matched that dropped over Europe during World War II and exceeded the volume the United States had used in the Pacific theater. As the stalemate persisted for two years starting in early 1951, the aerial bombardment continued until, as one European reporter in the north put it, there were "no more cities in North Korea" and the region's large cities and towns, leveled by "conventional" weapons, looked like decimated Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Estimates of casualties vary widely, but surely more than two million Koreans died, half or more of them civilians. The United States suffered approximately thirty-seven thousand deaths and over ninety thousand wounded in action.<sup>22</sup>



Nonetheless, the war's fearful consequences were strangely muted in American consciousness. Called a "police action" rather than a war, it was ostensibly a United Nations venture though clearly a US exercise in the uses of catastrophic firepower. The grinding, bloody stalemate from early 1951 to mid-1953 struck a sullen US public as a fruitless affair to be gotten over, and afterward became—at least in American but not Korean eyes—a "forgotten war." It was, and continues to be, a misunderstood war. Having its origins in the northern Korean resistance to Japanese colonial overlords, the Korean conflict fits historically in the sweep of anticolonial revolution that took off in the late 1940s as much as it belongs to the global Cold War. Within the United States, the Korean War provided context for the Red Scare: Joseph McCarthy, Indiana senator William Jenner, and others charged that Communist infiltration of the highest offices in US government had prevented a quick American victory. The academy and the arts suffered a growing assault on alleged subversives, via investigations, firings or dismissals, and blacklists. The repressive atmosphere likely accounted, Cumings supposes, for an absence of critical reportage on the war and hence its "unknown" or "forgotten" character.

Although sidelined in public life by the Red Scare, the black left led by Du Bois and Robeson managed through the 1950s to sustain a community of dissent around Robeson's new Harlem newspaper, *Freedom*; that milieu nurtured the early career of singer Harry Belafonte, who emerged by the late 1950s as a popular entertainer upholding a global multicultural vision in the guise of folklore. Nonetheless, the witch hunt claimed others who capitulated in one way or another to right-wing pressure. The celebrated composer Aaron Copland, whose *Lincoln Portrait* was pulled from the program of Dwight Eisenhower's inauguration when a Republican congressman complained of his Communist affiliations, testified before a closed session of McCarthy's Senate committee in May 1953, disavowing any sympathy with the Communist Party or Soviet Union. By then, even one of the Hollywood Ten, Edward Dmytryk, who had resisted the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1947 and served time for contempt of Congress, turned and testified about his Communist associates in Hollywood in order to escape the movie industry blacklist and return to directing films. In 1954, the Atomic Energy Commission denied the Manhattan Project physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer a security clearance on the grounds of alleged Communist associations in the 1930s.

The peace movement of the late 1940s had stalled by 1950. As United World Federalists lost members, young activists moved on to other causes.

Wallerstein joined the World Assembly of Youth, a pro-American body formed to combat the Soviets' World Federation of Democratic Youth. The University of Chicago effort to draft a world constitution had become "quixotic," as a Chicago historian later put it, and simply petered out.<sup>23</sup>

Even so, cosmopolitan visions that had arisen amid "one-world" sentiments showed some persistence through the 1950s. The Atomic Scientists of Chicago, initially connected to Hutchins's world federalism, kept the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* going through the 1950s even as the broader Federation of American Scientists, an early advocate of international control of atomic energy, dwindled away. The *Bulletin* warned of the threat of nuclear war with its famed "Doomsday Clock," measuring the danger of cataclysmic war by adjusting the minute hand before midnight—seven minutes short of the hour in 1947, two minutes before midnight in 1953 when both the United States and the Soviet Union were perfecting hydrogen bombs. The scientists supporting the *Bulletin* advocated disarmament, and at the first moment of "thaw" in the Cold War in 1955 they called for the first Conference on Science and World Affairs, inviting scholars East and West to meet at Pugwash, Nova Scotia, to discuss means of averting war. Also in the late 1950s, another small group of dissenters formed the Society for Social Responsibility in Science, pledging to refuse research projects with direct military application.<sup>24</sup>

On a more popular level, some American public school districts embraced the cosmopolitan, multicultural programs and publications of the UN cultural organizations, especially the children's relief fund UNICEF and the main scientific agency UNESCO—while others denounced UNESCO as communistic. Carrying UNICEF's orange trick-or-treat boxes, schoolchildren on Halloween began collecting small donations for war-injured kids in 1950. Two prominent internationalists involved in UNESCO, the author Pearl S. Buck and the Swedish sociologist Alva Myrdal, insisted that international collaboration in science and technology operated as a "two-way traffic" of intercultural exchange.

The cosmopolitan ideal of "two-way traffic" informed the comedic American play and movie, *The Teahouse of the August Moon*: despite its condescending caricatures of Asian peasants, the story shows a US military occupation officer on Okinawa bucking his colonel's orders, helping villagers build a ceremonial tea house rather than lecturing them in "democratic theory." In the process, he becomes converted to native ways, and the show serves as a send-up of absurd military hierarchy and American arrogance. Other satirical antimilitarist visions, held by disenchanting World War II veterans, would appear after

some delay in works like Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1960) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* (1968), reaching a new, younger audience critical of the Cold War. Those later works would recapitulate the antiwar spirit of earlier novels such as Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* and John Horne Burns's forlorn account of occupation duty in Italy, *The Gallery* (1947)—books whose frank cynicism about military power held less currency for much of the midcentury years once the embrace of hegemony was nearly complete.

### Hegemony and Worldliness

The cosmopolitan mood at midcentury stemmed not only from a response to the desolation of war and from the new condition of US hegemony but also from the new conditions of intellectual life shaped by the great migration of European scholars, writers, and artists to the United States begun during the interwar years. Already in the 1920s, the tempo of transatlantic scholarly communication and exchange had increased, due in part to fellowship programs like those supported by the Rockefeller family's foundations. The Swedish sociologists Gunnar and Alva Myrdal spent a year in the United States, 1929 to 1930, on a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship, soon followed by the Carnegie Corporation's funding of Gunnar Myrdal's research on the status of American blacks, which issued in *An American Dilemma* in 1944. The main bulk of intellectual and artistic sojourners and transplants consisted of refugees who began arriving in the early 1930s, first from Italy. Opponents of Mussolini included the journalist Max Ascoli, who would edit the prominent liberal journal *The Reporter* from 1949 to 1968, and historian Giuseppe Borgese, who contributed to the world-federalist movement at the University of Chicago. Then refugees from Central and Eastern Europe fled Hitler to the United States after 1933. Many held left-wing views, including the sophisticated Marxism developed by members of the Institute for Social Research, officially relocated from Frankfurt to Columbia University in 1934. A number of conservatives and right-leaning liberals such as philosopher Leo Strauss, political scientist Eric Voegelin, and business writer Peter Drucker also emigrated. An especially large contingent of refugees were wholly or partly of Jewish heritage, usually secular in outlook. All told, they came to wield considerable influence in American arts and sciences, notably in physics: Albert Einstein was one of the first to arrive, after renouncing German citizenship in 1933, to be followed by others who later helped lead the Manhattan Project, such as Enrico Fermi, Hans Bethe, Eugene Rabinowitch, Victor Weisskopf, Leo Szilard, and Edward Teller. Next to the physicists, Central European psychoanalysts had the greatest impact on American thought and culture after World War II, both in more or less "orthodox"

Freudian practice and as pioneers of Freudian “revisionism,” including Karen Horney, Erich Fromm, Erik Erikson, and Bruno Bettelheim. The great radical in that field, Wilhelm Reich, arrived in New York in 1939; his notions of collecting (in “orgone accumulators”) and liberating sexual energy led him into controversy with federal food and drug regulators and prosecutors, ending in his death in 1957 while imprisoned for mail-order fraud.

Whole schools of art, philosophy, and social science were virtually transplanted to the United States, where they left an indelible handprint. The principals of the Bauhaus school of art, architecture, and design—Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, László Moholy-Nagy, Josef Albers, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe—settled and continued their careers. The “neoliberal” Austrian school of economics was well represented in emigration, especially by its chief polemicist, Ludwig von Mises, who taught at New York University. The “other,” more left-leaning Vienna school, the philosophers of logical positivism led by Rudolf Carnap and Carl Hempel, became towering figures in the American academy. A number of leaders in the German field of art history, notably Rudolf Arnheim and Erwin Panofsky, assumed prestigious chairs in the United States; linguistic and literary theorists Roman Jakobson and René Wellek did likewise. Pioneering modernist composers Béla Bartók, Igor Stravinsky, and Arnold Schoenberg migrated and died in the United States. Renowned European conductors built postwar American careers as heads of the leading US symphony orchestras. The popular figure of Arturo Toscanini, best known for leading the NBC Symphony Orchestra in radio and later television broadcasts, died in the United States in 1957, when his body was returned to Italy.

Scores of other émigré artists and intellectuals found positions in the expanding public universities of the postwar years, which benefited from veterans enrolling under the GI Bill, the largesse of state legislatures, and, in the late 1950s, significant federal funding for higher education. Indiana University, for example, built one of the most prestigious music schools in the country with a faculty consisting largely of Central and Eastern European refugees. Private colleges and universities likewise took advantage of the influx of foreign talent. New York’s New School for Social Research, begun in 1919 by leading Progressive intellectuals, opened its doors to scholars fleeing Nazi persecution; its “University in Exile” subsequently became the New School’s Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science. Many Jewish refugee scholars found positions at historically black institutions in the South, while others joined the faculty of a new, nonsectarian Jewish university, Brandeis, launched in 1948. Their presence at these and other institutions paralleled a surge of enrollments by Jewish students at the Ivies and other elite schools that had previously set quotas on their admission.

Nonetheless, the émigré scholars, writers, and artists in the United States counted for only a tiny proportion of the Europeans displaced and victimized by the Nazi and fascist regimes. Immigration quotas blocked any large flow of refugees, and the main aid organization formed in 1933, the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced German [later European] Scholars, was compelled by immigration restrictions and limited funds to be highly selective in identifying candidates for rescue. After the war had begun and Germany defeated France, a new Emergency Rescue Committee led by the American journalist Varian Fry worked in the South of France to extricate endangered individuals, mostly Jews, from the clutches of the collaborationist Vichy regime, facilitating escape by a few thousand refugees, including Hannah Arendt; the surrealists Jean Arp, André Breton, and Max Ernst; and the young anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was present at a meeting in New York City when the founder of modern American anthropology Franz Boas died in 1942. After the war, most of the later refugees from France quickly returned home.

Postwar American social science was seeded with European innovators, jump-starting new developments in sociology, social psychology, survey research, and development economics. The upshot of this migration was a considerable broadening of American arts and sciences, what historian H. Stuart Hughes called “the deprovincialization of the American mind” as European traditions of erudition, sharp social and cultural criticism, and varied avant-garde movements made the transit.<sup>25</sup> The entrance of European scholars into the American academy also had the effect of smoothing the way for US scholarship to influence the postwar reconstruction of academic institutions in Europe.<sup>26</sup>

Even though a great deal of postwar American thought and culture dwelled on the idea of a common cultural inheritance known as “the West,” deprovincializing went beyond a transatlantic meeting of minds. Influences from elsewhere in the world widened the scope of cosmopolitanism beyond “Western civilization.” The Japanese scholar of Buddhism, Daisetsu T. Suzuki, lectured widely in the United States from the late 1940s, introducing audiences to “the essence of Zen” and winning adherents from composer John Cage to Beat writer Jack Kerouac. In 1959, another Zen practitioner, Shunryu Suzuki (unrelated to Daisetsu and modestly calling himself “the small Suzuki”), arrived in San Francisco and a few years later established the long-running, influential San Francisco Zen Center. These emigrations intersected: the Stanford University scholar of comparative religion Frederic Spiegelberg had fled Germany in 1937 and in 1951 helped establish another San Francisco center promoting familiarity with Buddhism, the American

Academy of Asian Studies, where the Englishman and former Episcopal priest Alan Watts wrote a best seller, *The Way of Zen* (1957). Beyond the Zen influx, scores of American Protestants who had been raised as part of missionary families in China, Japan, and Korea beginning in the early twentieth century now at midcentury achieved prominence, conveying to Americans some appreciation of East Asian cultures. One such “mish kid,” the author John Hersey, published *Hiroshima*, an account of the US atomic bombing of that Japanese city that first appeared in the *New Yorker* in 1946 and continued in multiple editions to reach a mass audience for decades after. Indeed, some of the sharpest disputes over US policy in the Far East were fought out in controversies between different camps of missionary offspring. On a smaller scale, American missionary efforts in the Middle East, such as the American University established in Beirut (1866) and Cairo (1919), helped fertilize interest in Muslim and Arab cultures. Mission-born Americans raised in the Middle East would come to play a role during and after World War II in fashioning US policy in the region, where oil, Arab and Persian nationalism, the Cold War, and the establishment of Israel in 1948 cooked up a politically turbulent stew.<sup>27</sup>

African American interest in Africa had deepened since the 1920s, sparked by Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association and a growing number of black students from abroad—first from the West Indies and then from Africa—matriculating at places like Fisk University in Nashville, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, and Howard University in Washington, DC. By the 1930s, a Pan-Africanist circle of black anticolonial intellectuals had begun to cohere, in part mobilized by opposition to Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia. The Trinidadian George Padmore had studied at Fisk in the 1920s and remained in the United States as an anticolonial agitator affiliated with the Communist Party, until he broke away from the party and established an independent Pan-Africanist center in London. There he collaborated with another Trinidadian writer, C. L. R. James, who worked in the United States from 1938 to 1951. An African nationalist Nnamdi Azikiwe, later president of independent Nigeria, had studied at Lincoln University and encouraged the young Kwame Nkrumah of the Gold Coast to apply there, which began Nkrumah’s sojourn in the United States from 1935 to 1945. Lincoln University president Horace Mann Bond promoted African studies.

The sociologist St. Clair Drake, best known for coauthoring the major study of Chicago’s south side, *Black Metropolis* (1945), had long-standing anticolonial views and met with Padmore and Nkrumah in 1947 while conducting research in Britain. Influenced by Padmore’s opposition to the Communists, Drake cofounded the Afro-World Fellowship on his return to

the United States as an alternative to the Communist-aligned, New York-based Council on African Affairs, which folded after years of anticommunist harassment in 1955. Through the 1950s, Drake wrote extensively about African liberation, particularly the nationalist movement led by Nkrumah in the Gold Coast. He would spend time in the Gold Coast—renamed Ghana after independence in 1957—and in the United States he worked with Bond in the American Society of African Culture, modeled on the Paris-based Society of African Culture. After independence, Ghana became a refuge for African American expatriates such as Julian Mayfield and Maya Angelou, who wrote about African independence for American readers and returned to the United States during the mid-1960s as Black Power advocates. In 1958 Du Bois regained the passport the United States had seized during the height of the Red Scare, emigrated to Ghana in 1961, and died there, a Ghanaian citizen, on August 27, 1963, the day before the March on Washington, where he was honored with a moment of silence.<sup>28</sup> The other great foreign pole of attraction for African Americans at midcentury was the heritage of Gandhi in the Indian independence movement. The black Methodist missionary James Lawson studied Gandhi's doctrine of *satyagraha* in Nagpur, India, before returning to the United States, collaborating with Martin Luther King Jr. and helping to organize the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in 1960.

### Hegemony and Nationalism

The Red Scare's strident nationalism and the contradictions of Cold War politics nonetheless qualified the apparent opening to the world that accompanied the new centrality of American power in the world. On the one hand, Cold War appeals to old and new allies had encouraged a posture of beneficence to other peoples and called forth, as historian Mary L. Dudziak and others have pointed out, affirmations of diversity and equity for all within the United States designed to be well advertised abroad.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, mobilization for war both hot and cold stimulated rally-round-the-flag pressures toward uniformity that evoked narrow definitions of national belonging and a jealous guarding of national borders. This combination of impulses had ramifying consequences throughout American life. The landmark report of a presidential committee recommending an end to racial segregation and Harry Truman's endorsement of a civil rights plank in his 1948 election platform signaled a new openness to cultural inclusion. The poet Gwendolyn Brooks published a 1949 book, *Annie Allen*, that won the Pulitzer Prize in 1950, the first time an African American writer had won in any of the Prize's

categories. A young veteran of Chicago's black literary renaissance, Brooks published her first book, *A Street in Bronzeville*, in 1945, memorializing life on the South Side where "you only had to look out of a window" for poetic material, including reflections on the hardships of black soldiers returning from the war. *Annie Allen* probed the life history of a "bronze girl" from childhood through womanhood, with passages of daunting, elusive verse built on modernist techniques. It was a period, Brooks wrote later, in terms utterly appropriate to the "centering" tenor of midcentury, when she "liked the sound of the word 'universal'" and "thought in terms of reaching everyone in the world." Yet despite the Pulitzer, a Guggenheim fellowship, and generally friendly reviews in *Poetry* magazine and elsewhere, Brooks remained subject to what the white poet Karl Shapiro said was "one of the rules of the poetic establishment[:] that Negroes are not admitted to the polite company of the anthology."<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, the 1940s witnessed important liberalizing changes in the laws of citizenship, while exclusion remained the watchword of immigration policy. The old Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943, at the same time Chinese immigrants won the right to naturalize as US citizens—though the terms set an annual quota of 105 Chinese, and only 1,428 Chinese were naturalized by 1952. During the wartime internment of Japanese Americans, California enforced the Alien Land Law denying land title to Japanese residents, but in 1946 California voters decisively rejected a ballot proposition reaffirming that law. Also that year, as the Philippines formally gained independence, federal law granted immigration and naturalization rights to Filipinos. In 1948, the same year the Supreme Court ruled that racially restrictive covenants in house sales (typically aimed at blacks and Jews) were unenforceable, the court also ruled unconstitutional those state laws that denied aliens the right to register land in the name of children who had citizenship by birth. Finally in 1952, the McCarran-Walter Act overturned the whites-only provision of the 1790 naturalization law, as well as granting quotas for East and Southeast Asian immigration—but very meager ones of one hundred annually for each country included. Exceptions from those quota limits were made for some number of Chinese fleeing the victorious Communists after 1949 and for Asian war brides of US servicemen.<sup>31</sup> In any case, the McCarran-Walter Act maintained the 1924 national-origins quota system, despite growing dissent among liberals and even moderates like Dwight Eisenhower, who considered that system racially discriminatory and contrary to the democratic posture the United States sought to show the world.<sup>32</sup>

Liberalization in these realms, such as it was, stemmed from the politics of World War II and the Cold War: during the war, China was an ally, and



after the war, Cold War priorities could not afford to alienate all Asians. But the Red Scare and the conservative surge of the 1950s trumpeted a stern anticommunism and narrow definitions of Americanism. Pat McCarran of Nevada, a conservative Democrat, chaired the Internal Security Committee, the Senate's counterpart to the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), and wrote into the immigration act of 1952 provisions for deporting subversives (whether immigrants or naturalized citizens) and barring entry to Communists and other foreign leftists. McCarran held that "this nation is the last hope of Western civilization" and in danger of being "overrun, perverted, contaminated or destroyed" by those "untold millions [who] are storming our gates for admission" and "transplanting . . . [European and Asian] problems en masse to the United States."<sup>33</sup> Compounding this move toward closure, even as a new cosmopolitanism tended to open the United States to the world, was a new 1952 State Department regulation, issued by Secretary of State Dean Acheson under the authority of the anticommunist Internal Security (McCarran) Act of 1950 that permitted denial of passports to American Communists or anyone deemed to be under their control. It was this rule that authorized the government to seize Du Bois's passport: scores of other writers, artists, scientists, ministers, and lawyers vaguely suspected of disloyalty were likewise denied permission to travel abroad.<sup>34</sup>

This pattern of incipient breaks in American systems of exclusion, combined with their reinforcement, characterized a great deal of the midcentury period—even as the general drift of intellectual opinion embraced new ideas of inclusion. The terms of inclusion and exclusion could also be inverted, in perverse ways: starting in the summer of 1953 and continuing through 1962, Congress acted to "terminate" federal recognition of American Indian tribal governments as a means of dismantling the reservation system—deemed un-American in its maintenance of collective property—and encouraging Native Americans to relocate to urban areas. It was a clear reassertion of coercive assimilation policies commenced in the late nineteenth century with the reduction of reservation lands, converted to private farming plots often peopled by whites, and the notorious system of Indian boarding schools hostile to all traditional Indian practices.

Taking into account the various modes of inclusion and exclusion, it appears that the nature and meaning of belonging to the American nation was once again subject to a tension-filled flux. Defining what it was that made "American culture" *American* became a principal mode of "centering" discourse at midcentury.

## CHAPTER TWO



# Inventing America, *Again*

Born in 1902 in the Midwest, the eminent literary scholar F. O. (Francis Otto) Matthiessen attended Yale University and then went on for a PhD and a professorship to Harvard, where he published his masterwork, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in Age of Emerson and Whitman*, in 1941. A large book treating only five writers in depth—Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman—this study, Matthiessen insisted, did *not* mean to describe the literary work of two decades, from 1836 to 1855, as “a re-birth of values that had existed previously in America, but as America’s way of producing a renaissance, by coming to its first maturity and affirming its rightful heritage in the whole expanse of art and culture.” Matthiessen’s diction clearly conveyed his strong sense of American belonging: he aimed to understand “the concentrated abundance of *our* mid-nineteenth century” through the medium of those “conceptions held by . . . *our* major writers concerning the function and nature of literature.” And he was self-conscious about his holistic approach, aimed at capturing the “whole movement” of the “general culture” during the period he studied. He would do so by plumbing the role of *myth*—“the primal vitality of the stories that are preserved in the popular memory”—and of *symbol* or image recurring in diverse arts, such as “the open air” that poets, landscape painters, or the new photographers of the antebellum years saw as their medium.<sup>1</sup> Matthiessen’s work gave birth to so-called myth-symbol analysis, setting the standard of the new discipline of American Studies, which had its own journal, *American Quarterly*, beginning in 1949.

Two writers later identified with “myth-symbol” analysis—Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx—had been Harvard students and colleagues of Matthiessen’s in the late 1930s. Marx edited the journal *Harvard Progressive*, associated with left-wing students and the Teachers Union of young faculty led by Matthiessen—all part of the Popular Front, a milieu of radicals and liberals who supported the New Deal, fought manifestations of fascism abroad and at home, and backed the power of the Soviet Union as the heart of antifascist forces abroad. Matthiessen collaborated with Communists but never joined the party: he described himself as a socialist and a Christian. His Christianity entailed convictions comprised, too, in his socialism—devotion to human equality and brotherly love—but with a recognition of the evil that dwelled within human beings as fallen creatures. He embraced the “tragic sense of life” he found in the work of Sören Kierkegaard and neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth. Thus, *American Renaissance* was buoyant in its affirmation of values Matthiessen deemed characteristically American—fresh as a springtime rebirth—but also measured. He meant to recover a “literature for our democracy . . . [composed in] our first great age,” so that “we can [again] feel the challenge of our still undiminished resources.” He loved Whitman but valued the “tragic sense of life” in Hawthorne. Emerson championed the ability to make the world new but was limited by overconfidence in “the increasing greatness of man”; Matthiessen cherished Thoreau’s mastery of “organic form,” the discovery in nature and in prose of “wholeness,” but he remained ambivalent about Thoreau’s “anarchical basis.” It was Melville’s “reckoning with . . . as much suffering and evil as he had seen” that granted to the novelist what Matthiessen admired most: access to “his own undisevered experience.”<sup>2</sup>

Matthiessen also evinced a bit of the American missionizing spirit. After the war’s end, he collaborated with Harvard students who established the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies—in occupied Austria—with the hope of offering Europe “something on the plane of ideas, scholarship, culture” to complement US aid for “material reconstruction.”<sup>3</sup> Matthiessen was the premier lecturer at the first Salzburg Seminar in the summer of 1947. He was eager to spend time overseas, he stated in the 1948 book describing his travels, *From the Heart of Europe*, because “I want to write about some of the things it means to be an American today. That is the chief thing I came to Europe to think about.”<sup>4</sup> Definitions of a nation’s culture often depend on views from afar, whether that of a foreign visitor or of nationals traveling abroad and looking back. And so Matthiessen, who studied “our first great age” so “we can [again] feel the challenge of our still undiminished resources,” might have been well equipped to hail the greatness of American

culture at midcentury. In *From the Heart of Europe*, he repeatedly noted the intense interest that European readers showed in American literature at a time when US power and influence in western Europe was paramount.

By then, however, Matthiessen appeared in the eyes of the American public as one of those deemed “un-American,” hounded by the press as a soft-minded apologist for the USSR. And then, suddenly: “Harvard Prof Identified as Plunge Victim,” the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported on April 1, 1950, naming the suicide as Matthiessen, who had been repeatedly smeared in that conservative newspaper’s columns.<sup>5</sup> Jumping from the twelfth floor of a Boston hotel, Matthiessen left a note confessing to severe depression, apologizing to his friends for his “desperate act,” and ending with a brief political testament: “How much the state of the world has to do with my state of mind I do not know. But as a Christian and a socialist believing in international peace, I find myself terribly oppressed by the present tensions.”<sup>6</sup> Whether his desperate act should be interpreted as a sign of dread amid Cold War pressures—or ascribed purely to inconsolable personal unhappiness—was something his friends and critics debated for a long time afterward. His work nonetheless remained a landmark of scholarly Americanism, an endeavor of national self-definition in terms of the country’s emblematic literary achievements. Yet this was a time when definitions of what is “American” were in flux, constantly subject to political pressure, and profoundly uncertain.

### Phases of Cultural Nation-Building

Matthiessen’s holistic method and his impulse to grasp a certain quality of American-ness in central literary achievements make him historically interesting, precisely because those dispositions no longer prevail quite so strongly as they did in his time. Many scholars today do not take it for granted that diverse, varied elements of social and cultural life necessarily hang together in such a way as to constitute a coherent whole, defining the heart and soul of a nation. Such assumptions now appear to be characteristic markers of Matthiessen’s time, not ours. Yet neither should we assume that Matthiessen’s historical period had a singular character or tone. The iconoclastic sociologist C. Wright Mills mocked “the great American celebration,” the patriotic ballyhoo of the 1950s, but it would be a mistake to judge the onset of the “American Studies” movement and other such inquiries as nothing but creatures of a Cold War–inspired drive for national unity. In fact, Matthiessen’s role in helping to define an “American” canon of literature ran up against, and in some ways militated against, that Cold War mobilization and its definitions of what was American or “un-American.” His search for

American-ness had its origins in aspirations quite distinct from the Americanizing project of his Cold War antagonists.

Given the unevenness of a nation's historical development, any attempt to pin down and classify its general consciousness can be an uncertain, possibly misleading venture in stopping time or immobilizing what is actually a moving target. At the middle of the twentieth century, as the United States consolidated its stature of world hegemony, the social and political relations defining American life were in flux, rendering many habitual assumptions of what was "American" culture and character either obsolete or subject to acute stress. The most sophisticated students of American history and culture at the time—particularly, those identified with American Studies or the so-called consensus history of the 1950s—in fact acknowledged that the very object, American-ness, was by nature a variable, fleeting, and fugitive thing, virtually beyond definition.

While attempts to fashion a distinctive "American" identity, character, or culture have persisted almost continuously since the mid-eighteenth century, the years of Matthiessen's antebellum renaissance stood out for the often strident claims by Americans to their cultural independence from Europe. The first half of the twentieth century marked another such period, when several trends combined to kick off a general drive to Americanize. Theodore Roosevelt, borrowing a phrase from the political journalist Herbert Croly, was not wrong to see a "new nationalism" afoot, evident in programs to foster the assimilation of immigrants. The phrase could apply to the drive to establish nationwide norms in all things, from grading meat to training physicians, and to fashion national cultural canons of artistic achievement even as intellectual life grew more cosmopolitan. That general spirit persisted for decades, gaining additional energy from efforts at morale building during the Depression and wartime. Those crises and the policy responses to them tended to concentrate and centralize political power on a national plane. Culturally, a new Americanist folklore movement arose, while mass migrations within the country meant the ever-deeper etching of transregional integration. All this, by 1950, would meld with the final achievement of globalist power and a furious political reaction determined to subdue left-wing dissent, just in time for military mobilization, again, to roll back Communism in Korea.

From 1900 to 1950, the rise of a modern stratum of intellectuals proved a key element of this great wave of cultural nation-building. The modern research university plus slick magazine publishing and the new age of the "little magazine"—all reaching their first peak in the first two decades of the twentieth century—fostered this new phenomenon by the 1920s: secular, self-conscious "intellectuals" whose vocation was precisely one of sensing

the temper of the times and commenting on “value” questions that once had been the province of ministers. Their advance, along with mass communications, popular culture, and ideological politics, led by the 1950s to the evaporation of distinctly Protestant hegemony amid the bland acknowledgment of “Judeo-Christian” values or “Protestant, Catholic, and Jew” ecumenism, which in some sense veered close to a modernist separation of sacred and secular realms.<sup>7</sup>

The current of literary criticism leading to Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance* emerged within this long phase of cultural nation-building. By Matthiessen’s own testimony, his orientation to American literature harkened back to an influential 1915 work of stock taking, Van Wyck Brooks’s *America’s Coming of Age*. Brooks’s subsequent call to excavate a “usable past” in American literary history would be followed by the rediscovery of Herman Melville in the 1920s and the inception of serious scholarly attention to *American* literature within formerly exclusive *English* departments. Nor was this long-term nationalizing trend disrupted by the disenchantment with American life voiced by “Lost Generation” writers of the 1920s. Historian Brooke Blower has demonstrated how the expatriate experience in Paris encouraged their “becoming American”—stemming from the mixed response of Parisians to putatively “American” styles and manners, as well as the American exiles’ view homeward.<sup>8</sup> The expatriate Harold Stearns issued his famously caustic collection of essays under the sarcastic title *Civilization in the United States* (1922), taking inspiration from Brooks’s critique of the Puritan heritage in *America’s Coming of Age*. Stearns wrote of his own rapprochement with home fifteen years later, in *America: A Re-Appraisal*.<sup>9</sup> Perry Miller, whose magisterial midcentury studies of American Puritanism upended the negative stereotype shared by Stearns’s expatriates, had been another wanderer abroad: he dated the origin of his scholarship to “a sudden epiphany” while he was looking for adventure in the Congo during the 1920s. It was there that he felt “the pressing necessity of expounding my America to the 20th century.”<sup>10</sup>

Many of these early cultivators of American cultural studies happened to be political radicals, as well as “new” Americans of immigrant origins, such as Alfred Kazin, whose *On Native Grounds* followed Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance* by only one year. Born to a Jewish immigrant family, Kazin narrated the story of *modern* American literature based on a deep familiarity with the literary record gleaned during long days and nights at the New York Public Library. His was one of the first landmark studies to include Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Faulkner within a national canon. Faulkner was elevated to high literary status by Malcolm Cowley’s 1946 edition of *The*

*Portable Faulkner*—only one of the volumes in the Viking Portable Library that added Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Poe, Whitman, and Fitzgerald to the series in one great rush from 1945 to 1948. Melville’s inclusion had to wait until 1952 and Henry James’s until 1956.

Tellingly, Perry Miller described his mission as expounding “the *innermost propulsion* of the United States” and began with the Puritan tradition because he sought “a coherence with which I could coherently begin.”<sup>11</sup> Thus he recapitulated Matthiessen’s holistic method, the notion that a culture or a nation could be taken as a whole, summing up its elements in a complex, but singular, overarching view.

### Taking Things Whole

The method had been germinating for some time. The historian Mary Ritter Beard wrote in 1933 that the “tendency of contemporary social thought is in the direction of integrating all the aspects of life,” amounting to an “intellectual revolution”: “All the divisions of thought, so assiduously cultivated by specialists—such as economics, politics, war, art, literature, education and feminism—are being dissolved as independent entities.”<sup>12</sup> Those artificially separate elements actually intertwined with all others in an inclusive entity usually dubbed either “culture” or “society”—each suggesting some kind of comprehensive container of human relations, each a term having a long history but seized upon by modern disciplines (anthropology and sociology, respectively) only recently secured in American academic life. By 1950, many colleges were only just establishing departments in these fields, a process much further advanced by 1960. That decade was a time for the modern academic disciplines to take stock of their accomplishments. And so in the capstone essay of a great compendium, *The Golden Age of American Anthropology*, the grand old man of the field, Alfred Kroeber, upped the ante to focus attention on a higher-order synthesis—*civilization*—and judged in the wake of devastating world wars that “our [Western] civilization” was not “disintegrating” but rather “reconstituting” itself “on an ampler scope,” akin to the transition from the High Middle Ages to early modern times.<sup>13</sup> Few remarks better expressed the remarkable confidence with which some observers reasserted the promise of modernity in the mid-twentieth century.

The liberal newspaper columnist Max Lerner took up the spirit of stock taking as well as Kroeber’s notion of “civilization” when he wrote in 1957, “Americans are beginning to turn a searchlight on themselves and their civilization, and interpret both to the world.” And he echoed Mary Beard, too, when he took as his topic “the grand theme of the nature and mean-

ing of the American experience,” for “whenever I have tried to chip off a fragment—on American government, on liberalism, on foreign policy, on morals—I found that it lost some of its meaning when torn from the rest.” Lerner’s book, *America as a Civilization*, sought amid all the varied aspects of Americans’ lives—work, play, child-rearing, class, status—to discern “the connective and organizing principles that hold their civilization together.”<sup>14</sup> Yet even if one did not reach for the grand term *civilization*, national self-assessment during the late 1940s and the 1950s typically assumed a centered frame of analysis.

In the common sense of the time, a nation’s culture rested on the shape of its “society,” and society, too, had a center, in those sentiments that bound people together and fostered cohesion. The principal architect of this notion in the realm of high theory was the Harvard University sociologist Talcott Parsons: for him *society* as such cohered because its members held in common some body of “shared values,” which were woven into the norms and expectations of everyday human action that people learned through the institutions (family, school, neighborhood, church, occupations, courting rituals, popular entertainment, and much more) that nurtured them from birth. At a time when war called upon a “nation” to act as one, it was but one more step to claim that some definite set of principles—a national “creed”—was what made a people into a nation. So “American society” was a distinct thing, with its own “American creed,” as were “German society,” “Japanese society,” or “Russian society.”

The disposition had first gained its clearest exposition as the United States entered World War II and scholars rushed to provide their services to the war effort. The anthropologist Margaret Mead helped set a standard for wartime studies of “American culture” that seemingly reversed the self-conscious “alienation” of figures, like Mead herself, who had started out in the 1920s as cultural critics. Mead had made headlines across the country in the late 1920s when she ventured alone, at age twenty-five, to the South Pacific to study the sexual maturation of Samoan girls; her book, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, an unusual “cross-over” hit for general readers, ended with a critique of the heavy-handed moralism of sexual repression in American life. Mead’s slight figure, boyish haircut, and advocacy of personal freedom situated her as a stereotypical “flapper”; what wasn’t publicly known was her more bohemian, transgressive side. Married young to fellow anthropologist Luther Cressman, she was also a lesbian lover to her mentor Ruth Benedict, married and divorced twice more to other anthropologists Reo Fortune and Gregory Bateson, both of whom she met on further fieldwork ventures—before settling into a long-time intimate partnership with Rhoda Métraux in the mid-1950s. An advocate of free love in her



personal life, she nonetheless strove for mainstream recognition and acclaim, managing despite the limits on academic appointments for women to establish a wide network of elite professional associations in American social science.

Mead's personal nonconformity, critique of rigid American morals, and even her youthful past of flirting with "Red" causes did not prevent her from joining the war for democracy and celebrating the American way of life in her 1942 book, *And Keep Your Powder Dry*. Rather than depict a country dominated by a combination of prudish strictures, the narrow-minded pursuit of moneyed success, and gun-toting chauvinism—critical themes of the 1920s—Mead hailed the pluralism, neighborliness, commonsense ethics, and problem-solving vigor of Americans. She acknowledged national foibles as well but could justify highlighting the "positive attributes" of national culture in a state of emergency that called for "building morale" above all else. It was not a little ironic that Mead's approach, commonly known as "culture and personality" studies, stemmed from the alienation of her teacher, Franz Boas, from the nation-building crusades of World War I; enraged by the political repression and xenophobia promoted by Wilson's war government and adopted by conformist patriots and hypocritical men of science as well, Boas looked askance at nationalist rituals and wished, after the war, to probe critically the forces that bound individuals so tightly to conventions of belonging. Most of his students, even as they gained academic repute in the 1920s, nursed a sense of being ethnic, political, and moral outsiders. By the late 1930s, Boas and Benedict took up the task of polemicizing against Nazi racism, often in league with Communist-front organizations building the antifascist Popular Front. Boas himself died in December 1942, only a year into the US war effort, and never faced the anticommunist harassment that some of his collaborators did. Mead, however, managed to avoid all such entanglements.

Still, war-borne studies of American national character and culture did not entirely eschew criticism. Harvard's Parsons joined the campaign for "national morale," writing long reports analyzing the main "structural" elements of American society (including social class distinctions and ethnic antagonisms) and trying to identify a "social tradition" of basic beliefs, values, and symbols. He cited central American norms of "achievement" and "equality of opportunity" as well as an openness to change he associated with "the rational-critical spirit" and "instrumental activism" (the belief that problems posed by nature or society could be remedied by reason and effort) in terms quite similar to Mead's *And Keep Your Power Dry*. But he also noted strains of anti-intellectualism, authoritarianism, militarism, and deep ethnic prejudice that did not permit him to distinguish, absolutely, the American

scene from those elements of European societies that had spawned fascist mass movements.

The pursuit of an American “social tradition” found its most celebrated exponent in one of those foreign sojourners who had periodically provided Americans with a mirror—the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal, whose Carnegie-sponsored research on the “Negro problem” led to the publication of *An American Dilemma* in 1944. Myrdal famously opened the book with a description of the “American creed”: principles of human equality and individual freedom, allegedly rooted in a synthesis of Enlightenment and Christian universalism with the natural rights language of the Declaration constituted, for Myrdal, a long-standing and continuous tradition, quite like Parsons’s “shared values.” Yet much of American behavior, most notably white racism and discrimination against African Americans, violated such precepts—a contradiction at the heart of the nation that made race in the United States a “white problem,” *not* a “Negro problem.” Large parts of Myrdal’s narrative and analysis were thoroughly unflattering, except that Myrdal saw a trend toward the generalization of ideals and a trend toward ideological coherence that would in time compel Americans to reject and overturn the Jim Crow system and affirm racial equality.

*An American Dilemma* was clearly a product of war in its friendly view of the United States as Europe’s rescuer and its recognition of the world leadership the United States would achieve at war’s end. The book would continue to dominate liberal American thinking about race through the mid-twentieth century, though it clearly had its critics. Many white southerners resented a foreigner’s assault on their system of racial segregation. Some African American writers—most notably Ralph Ellison in a 1944 essay only published many years later—also had deep reservations, scoring Myrdal’s denial that African American ways had integrity as a viable subculture as well as Myrdal’s failure to credit black “agency” in social change.<sup>15</sup> Ellison’s temporarily suppressed attack indeed hit a soft spot in Myrdal’s account, and showed Ellison to be “out of step” in the best sense, challenging the assumption that national culture must be viewed as a single homogeneous whole. The fault Ellison located in Myrdal’s work was less a matter of the sociologist’s racial blinders to the qualities of “black culture” than it was an assumption Myrdal shared with quite a few black social scientists intent on combatting racism—namely, that there was *no such thing* as black culture but *only* a common “American culture,” whose variations and mutations might be regional or class based. The poor behaved differently from the rich as a result of their material deprivation, but that was definitely not a *racial* matter. American Negroes, they wished to say, must be viewed as nothing but

American. Just a decade or so later, other African American writers would join Ellison in challenging that position, disclosing deep strains embedded within American culture and making it appear more as a knotted tangle than a whole.

Myrdal whetted the appetite for the foreigner's perspective. His far more literary ancestor, Alexis de Tocqueville—sojourner of that earlier period in cultural nation-building celebrated by Matthiessen—enjoyed an unexpected “revival” at midcentury. Tocqueville's Whig-inflected view of the Jackson era, *Democracy in America*, was reprinted in its English translation often through the mid-nineteenth century and once again in 1900, but it did not see another edition until 1945, with a flurry of new editions resuming from the mid-1950s until our own day.<sup>16</sup> The midcentury resonance of Tocqueville's text rested on more than merely holding up another mirror to Americans. He had been one of the first to say, despite the frontier “backwardness” of antebellum America, that its “democracy” represented the image of the future facing Old Europe as well—a claim that seemed congruent with the country's mid-twentieth-century status as “leader of the free world.” Moreover, Tocqueville brought to midcentury readers a methodological disposition that appealed to intellectuals retreating from a putative “vulgar Marxism” that analyzed society in terms of divergent “economic interests” of business owners and wage workers. Tocqueville wished to uncover the *moeurs* of democratic America, the word incorporated into English as “mores,” meaning a people's everyday customs or their “habits of the heart.” Tocqueville sought to capture something like a “way of life,” matching the holistic bias of mid-twentieth-century American thought and culture.

Tocqueville's new readers appreciated the complexity of his arguments. His investigation into habits of the heart did not settle into a simple, reductive formula. He treated a great many diverse sides of American culture and polity—science, war, marital relations, and more—all shaped distinctively by a “democratic” society that rested on “equality of condition,” referring not to an even level of income, wealth, or status shared by all but rather to the absence of *fixed*, aristocratic rank stratiating society. Tocqueville saw a fine balance in American life between the self-reliance and pugnacious equality of (white) citizens, on the one hand, and key elements of common law, Protestant piety, and devotion to the male-headed conjugal family that effectively tempered the fissiparous tendencies of democracy with respect for tradition and for moral order. These provided ballast to modern democracy, securing its stability and persistence.<sup>17</sup>

Tocqueville hit on another problem, however, that resonated with mid-century anxieties about “mass society” and its apparent susceptibility to

authoritarianism. American individualism, he wrote, had the peculiar cast of combining a principle of utter self-reliance with a disinclination to differ dramatically from one's neighbors. A tendency toward uniformity—being like all others while remaining apart from them—could result in a distinct kind of democratic despotism, not so much a matter of the majority subjugating dissent or creative minorities but a despotism by all over all. Tocqueville discerned the peculiarity of rugged individuals who were nonetheless put in “leading strings,” doomed—in twentieth-century language—to conformism. Compounding that kind of despotism was a corresponding retreat into the private world of isolated families, deserting public life and thus surrendering the state to whatever elite might occupy its offices. Hence the Tocquevillian paradox: the combination of individual self-reliance and conformism, of loneliness and submergence in the mass. It was an analysis that would echo with mid-twentieth-century accounts of the social bases of totalitarianism, the “democracy” of deracinated solitaries enlisting in their own domination. Or, in a less apocalyptic description, it simply presaged what the most renowned contemporary sociological analyst of American life called *the lonely crowd*.

### Conflict and Order in the Late 1940s

All these trends keyed a *centered* notion of society, culture, and nation—understood as bounded entities built around some “innermost” principle or pattern. Such intellectual assumptions were compounded by the experience of the Depression and war, which drove an increasingly centralized order of decision making. National unity is the watchword of modern “total” war, and although government employed coercive means on the home front—most evident in the internment of Japanese Americans for the duration—most Americans regarded the war effort as a striking success in achieving national solidarity *without* many egregious instances of political repression. Yet having come together in 1945 to mourn the death of Franklin Roosevelt on April 12, and then to celebrate V-E and V-J days, the nation quickly entered one of its most tumultuous periods of conflict ever. Industrial strikes measured in the number of work stoppages, the number of workers involved, and the number of hours lost to production all reached a peak never seen before or after in US history.

While striking employees viewed their actions as the hard-won rights of citizens and a claim to an “American standard of living,” employers and conservative politicians appealed equally to national norms in demanding the restoration of “order.” That season of protest, which also spurred rising demands for racial equality by American minorities and even a measure of

agitation to improve conditions for women, flared for a year or so and kept alive potent strains of social and cultural criticism into 1948, when the intensification of the newly dubbed “cold war” with the Soviet Union started to put a cap on precisely that kind of dissent. By 1950 and 1951, as the Korean War brought domestic anticommunism to new heights, the mood had returned to one of national uniformity, though more in the fashion of sullen restraint than the buoyant celebration of 1945. The critic and literary scholar Newton Arvin remarked “that the ‘four or five’ postwar years from 1945–50 might have been more nerve-wracking for Americans than the whole rest of the thirty-year crisis since the beginning of World War I.”<sup>18</sup> They left many American observers with a sense of whiplash. In the McCarthyite period, a sterner sense of a single, coherent Americanism settled in, intent on subduing the antagonisms the last few years had revealed.

The experience of whiplash bears some clues to key historical questions. Why, for instance, did the massive draft of women workers into war production *not* unleash, right away, a “second wave” of women’s activism for broader rights succeeding the first struggle for suffrage culminating in 1920? After all, Susan B. Anthony II, grand-niece of the great suffragist leader, had written in her 1943 book *Out of the Kitchen—Into the War: Woman’s Winning Role in the Nation’s Drama* that war work would “unlock millions of doors that have imprisoned millions of women.”<sup>19</sup> In her view, the war had made women’s liberation from the confines of the private home a national necessity—not simply because of the needs of the wartime economy but also because maintaining “discrimination against women . . . because they are women . . . gives aid and comfort to our enemies.”<sup>20</sup> Although most wartime propaganda calling for women to join the workforce portrayed their new industrial roles as a temporary expansion of their “home front” duties, to be relinquished once their men returned, surveys found that most female war workers wished to keep their jobs in peacetime, and a few unions at least tried vigorously to protect them. And while Elaine Tyler May has argued that the occasional 1930s movie image of the independent “career women” disappeared from Hollywood productions in the 1940s, in fact the classically ambivalent portrayal of such women—admirable for their spunk but questionable marriage partners—persisted for some time: the popular Spencer Tracy–Katherine Hepburn movie *Adam’s Rib* (1949), for instance, pictured the stars as two lawyers, taking different sides in a court case regarding a woman’s revenge against her philandering husband. Hepburn famously played similar roles in *The African Queen* (1951) and *Pat and Mike* (1952).

In fact, a new wave of agitation for women’s rights *had* followed the war. On the left, the Congress of American Women (CAW) began in 1946 as

a peace organization protesting the rise of anti-Soviet foreign policy, relying in part on “maternalist” arguments: women as bearers and nurturers of children had special reasons for resisting the drift toward a new war. But the CAW also offered a comprehensive program to promote equal rights across the gender line, demanding not only equal pay for equal work but also equal pay for comparable work, thus challenging the gendered segmentation of the labor market between, say, truck drivers and typists. It sought to end all discrimination against women and promoted a program of public housing to be equipped with common cafeterias and twenty-four-hour childcare “to free women from housekeeping.” The CAW drew special attention to the problems of black women, insisting that New Deal labor regulations be extended to agricultural and domestic service workers. Anthony, originally a Quaker activist, joined CAW, as did the granddaughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Nora Blatch Barney, and the famed African American educator Mary McLeod Bethune. With a number of Communists in its leadership and links to the Communist-led Women’s International Democratic Federation, the CAW was among the first “front” groups placed on the Attorney General’s List of Subversive Organizations. Meanwhile, at the Communist Party’s Jefferson School of Social Science in New York City, a group of lecturers including Eleanor Flexner, poet Eve Merriam, and émigré Gerda Lerner taught pioneering courses on women’s history from 1949 to 1954.

A minitrend in transatlantic letters produced a number of landmark works in these years challenging fixed sex roles. A Viennese émigré to London, sociologist Viola Klein, argued in *The Feminine Character: History of an Ideology* (1946) that women’s subordination to men, their putative emotionality and tenderness, all stemmed from social and cultural stereotypes ungrounded in natural instincts or biological necessity. She went on to collaborate with Alva Myrdal, the Swedish feminist married to Gunnar Myrdal, in writing *Women’s Two Roles: Home and Work* (1956). In France, Simone de Beauvoir published *The Second Sex* in 1949. Less well-known was the American poet Ruth Herschberger who wrote a fierce assault on masculine power, *Adam’s Rib* (1948), unrelated to the movie released the following year. With striking irreverence and wit, Herschberger anticipated many of the lines of attack taken by better-known advocates twenty years later: showing contempt for the notion of penis envy, analyzing male privilege as well as the pernicious child-rearing regimen aimed at inhibiting girls’ self-assertion, dismantling the myth of vaginal orgasm, denouncing rape as violent crime, cataloguing literary misogyny from Nietzsche to D. H. Lawrence, mocking the masculinist biases of ostensibly objective (masculine) scientists, comparing women’s subordination to the “caste” status of African Americans, and assailing the

despotism of “normality.” As Hershberger put it, “Today, women cannot decide whether to be abnormal and achieve something, or be normal and abandon their ambitions.”<sup>21</sup> When the “second wave” of feminism broke on the scene in the late 1960s, a few of the young activists hailed *Adam’s Rib* as an “unheeded” classic, though later histories have again neglected it.<sup>22</sup>

The combined suppression and contraction of the American left contributed to the lapse of a vigorous feminism. Following the disappointing Wallace campaign, Communist Party activists were thrown back on the defensive as they continued to denounce the Cold War policy that had become a major-party consensus by 1948–1949. By then, the espionage trials tarred Communists as an internal enemy. While Communists had been the largest contingent on the far left, anti-Stalinist radicals also suffered stigmatization, or, under the pressure of events, drifted toward the anticommunist mainstream. All left-wing parties lost members, and ardent attempts to sustain an “independent radicalism” that supported “neither Washington nor Moscow” faltered by 1950.<sup>23</sup> Ardent feminism retreated as well.

Harassed by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the Congress of American Women closed down in 1950, and one of its leaders, Columbia anthropology instructor Gene (Regina) Weltfish, was driven out of the academy. The FBI had tailed her since the war years, since she coauthored an antiracist pamphlet with Ruth Benedict, *The Races of Mankind*, withdrawn from GI libraries after southern congressmen complained about its insistence on racial equality. In 1949, Yale anthropologist George Murdock, a former naval officer who collaborated with the Central Intelligence Agency and informed on “Reds,” fingered Weltfish as a Communist Party member. Finally, senators McCarran and McCarthy called her to testify at two hearings, in 1952 and 1953, due to reports that she had made speeches alleging US use of biological warfare in Korea. While clearly a critic of the war, Weltfish argued those reports had misquoted and distorted her remarks; in any case, she pled the Fifth Amendment in refusing to answer questions about her political associates. Thereafter, her instructorship at Columbia was terminated. Downtown in New York, at the Jefferson School, the courses in women’s history offered by Flexner, Merriam, and Lerner came to an end by around 1953 as the school’s battles with the federal government’s Subversive Activities Control Board drained its funds and enrollment declined. The three instructors had begun drifting away from the Communist Party; the Jefferson School closed a few years later.

In intellectual life, the most renowned episode marking the “deradicalization” of left-wing writers came in 1952, when the preeminent magazine of literary and cultural criticism, *Partisan Review* (PR), convened a symposium titled “Our Country and Our Culture,” inviting contributors to reflect on

the strikingly more friendly disposition that modernist intellectuals now bore toward American culture and politics than they had avowed even five years earlier. For a journal like *PR*, which had begun in the late 1930s as a venue for anti-Stalinist leftists and modernists resistant to all conformity, the note of national *belonging* indicated by the first-person plural possessive *our* signaled a sea change. The language of belonging ironically echoed F. O. Matthiessen's in his *American Renaissance*. Yet *PR* had already, in late 1948, denounced Matthiessen as a "sentimental fellow-traveler" whose book *From the Heart of Europe*—written in a Wallace-ite vein hoping to help avert a new war breaking out from East-West tensions—had whitewashed Soviet tyranny and the perfidy of Czech Communists.<sup>24</sup> By 1952, in an age of cultural nation building, *PR* had apparently joined the fold.

### **Americanness as a Moving Target— and the Un-American Specter**

The impression that a firm nationalistic consensus had gripped intellectual life by 1950 significantly misreads the midcentury literature on American culture, however, for the attempt to seize the essence of Americanism lay astride still-unresolved changes in American life. The most zealous guardians of Americanism, the principal spokesmen of HUAC, stood as exemplars of an old America already fading from view, which of course did not mean that they lacked power. The very meaning of "un-American" was uncertain, as the committee's own history suggested. In its first incarnation as a temporary committee started in 1934 by the Jewish New York congressman Samuel Dickstein, HUAC aimed its fire against pro-German, pro-Nazi propaganda within the United States—antithetical to Dickstein's identification of American principles with melting-pot tolerance. Dickstein's Special Committee was overtaken in 1938 by a revamped HUAC led by Texas conservative Martin Dies as part of the southern Democratic backlash against the New Deal. In this right-wing incarnation, HUAC became a "permanent" committee of the House in 1945, at the initiative of Mississippi congressman John E. Rankin.

Back in the mid-1930s, Rep. Dickstein would have judged the Ku Klux Klan "un-American," but in 1946 Rankin summarily dismissed the suggestion that HUAC investigate the Klan: "After all, the KKK is an old American institution."<sup>25</sup> Rankin's nation had a color (as a "white man's country") that was seconded by Texas Rep. Hatton W. Summers, who hailed the committee for its work in preserving "the Anglo-Saxon form of government."<sup>26</sup> As he assailed film actors backing the "Hollywood Ten" writers and directors,



who had refused to cooperate with HUAC investigations, Rankin thought he scored points by revealing their Jewish birth names: Danny Kaye was really Kaminsky, Edward G. Robinson really Emmanuel Goldenberg. But that kind of Americanism was already a relic. Even in the conservative reaches of the US military command, the tradition of regarding the United States as a “Protestant nation” had been cast aside, as wartime campaigns welcoming Jews and Catholics into the ranks of a “tri-faith America,” in historian Kevin Schultz’s phrase, became “standard operating procedure.”<sup>27</sup>

Most sophisticated observers at the time believed that the rapid succession of the Depression, New Deal, and world war had shifted the country and its way of life onto new ground. The old order of “rugged” self-reliance receded before a new age of large organizations and government provision of social services based on the newfound watchword of “security”—usually regarded as a salutary change. As the most recognizable sociologist of the time (pictured on the cover of *Time* magazine), David Riesman offered a view of the sea change in his Tocqueville-inspired book *The Lonely Crowd*. His description of a great shift from the characteristic nineteenth-century “inner-directed” personality to new “other-directed” types suited to “organized” social structures was no hand-wringing Jeremiad. He chose not to mourn the inner-directed man as he saw possibilities for creativity and “autonomy” in a new ordering of work and leisure more attuned to social relationships.<sup>28</sup> In his view, the hunters of “un-American” heresy were painfully obsolete, rooted in an old way of life, declaring forever the greatness of the American entrepreneur, the hardy individualist, and the Protestant moralizer.

It was this notion of a sea change in American society, culture, and personality that lay at the heart of the diagnoses offered by “consensus historians” of the 1950s—so named by later critics who thought finding an ideological consensus in the past fit all too well with a conservative drive to foster national homogeneity during the Cold War. One of the “consensus” historians, Daniel Boorstin, indeed praised a kind of American exceptionalism in his *Genius of American Politics* (1953)—a deep history of consensual political traditions that inoculated Americans against the extreme ideologies of the Old World.<sup>29</sup> Other practitioners of the “consensus” method in history had quite different aims: they sought to advance the disenchantment of America as they examined the flux in American ideologies that the Red-hunting committees tried to arrest. “Consensus” historiography was in fact a mode of political and cultural criticism by analysts who hoped to demystify American life.<sup>30</sup> They recognized a “center” to American tradition, but one they hoped was waning.

This program is clearly evident in the work of Louis Hartz, Richard Hofstadter, and F. O. Matthiessen's student Leo Marx. All three had emerged from left-wing milieus of the 1930s. By the 1950s, they found themselves, to varying degrees, disenchanted with their own past hopes for radical change, yet they retained enough of their early critical views to welcome what a later historian called "the unraveling of America's sacred history."<sup>31</sup> Hartz famously diagnosed an American heritage built upon the "liberalism" of John Locke, but it was a heritage he did not glorify; he aimed, instead, "to drive a wedge of rationality through the pathetic indecisions of social thought," to reveal the costs of a Lockian mentality that obscured the real conflicts and quandaries that modern social life posed throughout the world, including the United States. Hofstadter was the anatomist of American "reform," appearing in different guises like Populism or Progressivism but consistently disabled in his view by throwbacks to a mythic individualism rooted in an agrarian yeoman's pride or in middle-class Christian moralism. Marx returned to Matthiessen's "Renaissance" and found a "pastoral" image of America perfectly balanced between rude nature and social refinement, which Melville above all others had recognized for what it was: an escapist reverie willfully blind to the brutalities of industrial capitalism.

These were the prior modes of consensus, the dominating mentalities of times past, from which America was nearly freed as the transforming experience of the Depression and war scattered old illusions. The American people might now finally acknowledge that they belonged to the world at large rather than standing apart from it; that individuals could not solve all social problems by pursuing private self-interest or upholding inherited standards of moral righteousness; and that a technologically advanced world required foresight, even planning, to satisfy common needs and expectations. Perhaps, these historians thought, the country was ready to enter modern times on the basis of principles quite different from the agrarian and commercial individualism that had long stunted American government, political thought, and social policy. Whatever the distance from their socialist past, each suggested that modern conditions required some kind of rational, collective action guided by a clear-eyed assessment of how the United States had changed since its founding. Yet Hartz, Hofstadter, and Marx remained uncertain whether Americans would face this challenge or flee from it.<sup>32</sup>

### **"Present Things as Also Past and Future"**

Inhabiting a nation they once regarded as provincial but now suddenly "the center of world awareness," as Jacque Barzun put it, modern intellectuals

accustomed to the status of “critics” endured what sociologist Talcott Parsons called “role strain.” In one respect, the vocation of “criticism” implies a proclivity to “dissent”; in another, the role of the critic, in assessing quality, involves evaluation, ranking, and cultivating distinction. The latter came to count precisely as the United States achieved world hegemony. The midcentury became a time for taking stock of achievements and securing the foundations on which to build a new era. This was the moment to build canons; that is, standards of greatness in one sphere of culture after another. Canon-building is a profoundly *centering* impulse, and as so much in the world of arts and culture came to be recentered in the United States following the end of World War II, American intellectuals went to work, defining the bounds of a heritage, determining a lineage of achievements, clarifying bodies of knowledge to be mastered, refined, and elaborated.

It is of the nature of a “canon” that it appears to be self-evident as a standard of reference. Initially, the term alluded to religious tradition, denoting a definite set of sacred texts and sanctioned laws and rituals; as a result, the sense of something simply *given* adheres to the idea of a canon of cultural achievements. In our own time, when our intellectual dispositions lean to historicizing everything, we instinctively doubt the *givenness* of “canons,” knowing them to have been “constructed” over time in the wake of many controversies. In the 1950s, it might be forgotten that the novels of Herman Melville were only “rediscovered” in the 1920s and *not* widely read or recognized as great in their own time. In *American Renaissance*, Matthiessen noted that the great novelist Henry James had likely never read Melville. Even Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* suffered from “obscurity of reputation” for decades after the poet’s death.<sup>33</sup> Yet thanks to Matthiessen and others writing in the second quarter of the twentieth century, it could be taken for granted that “American literature” began with Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Whitman, Melville, and others—as if all these were in fact the leading lights of their own age and standard setters for all ages to come.

Matthiessen was not only a canon-builder. He stood on the shoulders of other leaders in that venture going back a few decades, and he brought to his project a fine-grained analysis of texts—of rhetoric, allusion, and stylistic technique—that shared some of the methods ascribed to the so-called New Criticism. He began by claiming that his five writers regarded the “metaphysical” poets of England’s seventeenth century, such as John Donne, as their masters; the American Renaissance writers likewise probed the metaphysical polarities of the abstract and the concrete, of thought and experience, mind and body, spirit and nature, the ideal and the real in hopes of overcoming those divisions. Despite their best efforts at bridging the opposites to

realize “the whole,” Matthiessen suggested, Emerson and Thoreau typically defaulted to the first pole of those dualities (too abstract and ideal); Hawthorne and Melville leaned to the second, which in Matthiessen’s twice-born Christian sensibility had the benefit of recognizing “dark” truths of human existence. The metaphysical polarities were joined in Matthiessen’s analysis by a set of opposites deemed typically “American”: the optimism of the “new Adam” in a “virgin land” versus Calvinist brooding over man’s fallen state; the raucous humor of frontier heroes versus the arid intellectualism of churchman and lawyer; above all, the split between individuality and the sense of common experience, together fashioning a Janus-faced American devotion to “democracy.”<sup>34</sup> Matthiessen saw in the period of the American Renaissance an unleashing, for better and worse, of the individual as well as a recognition of “the need for a new ethical and cultural community.” His admiration for Hawthorne did not preclude criticism: Hawthorne was unable, in his account, “to pass across in imagination from his relatively simple time and province to the dynamic transformations of American society that were just beginning to emerge.”<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, Matthiessen saw in the Renaissance years an early dawning of industrialism, the immature signs of “our newer mutual dependence” or the social interdependence of modernity that Americans in Matthiessen’s own time still failed sufficiently to recognize or act upon.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, he saw his time as one of still-unfulfilled promise, much like the 1840s. Hence Matthiessen’s repeated allusions to “possibilities,” to unrecognized “opportunities,” the “unexpressed abundance” of American life, and to Emerson’s dictum that “it is the faculty of the poet to see present things as if . . . also past and future.”<sup>37</sup> If “Melville could feel that the deepest need for rapaciously individualist America was a radical affirmation of the heart,” it was Whitman who was best able to make that affirmation, and hence serve as the Hegelian synthesis of the light and dark tendencies of the other writers Matthiessen examined. For Whitman believed insistently in “the fresh opportunities for the English tongue” in the “whole range of American facts,” and his ability to “release ‘new potentialities’ of expression for our native character.”<sup>38</sup>

There was something Joycean in Matthiessen’s depiction of Whitman, as if Whitman, like James Joyce’s Stephen Daedalus, sought to “forge the *uncreated* consciousness” of the country and its “previously unexpressed” abundance. For Matthiessen, this aspiration had less to do with pinpointing in the past the substance of “America”; rather, he quoted Nietzsche at the end of *American Renaissance* that only “the architect of the future can hope to decipher” the meanings presented to us by the past. Thus, even Matthiessen, in probing “American characteristics” in literature, suggested that

“America” did not exist but was yet to be, something still to be achieved. He shared “the belief in *the possibility of a native culture*” rather than faith in its presence or its preservation.<sup>39</sup>

Matthiessen had followed both Melville and Whitman through to their deaths, within a year of each other in the early 1890s. Alfred Kazin, a younger critic, took up the story of “American literature” in the subsequent period as he intended to challenge George Santayana’s depiction of the devitalized “genteel culture” in fin de siècle America. Kazin’s *On Native Grounds* rebutted the idea of provincialism, the assumption that American arts represented an “outpost of Europe,” and aimed to recenter a vibrant literary tradition “here.”

Published in 1942 once the United States had fully entered the world war, Kazin’s book captured the half-century-long process of national self-definition leading to his historical moment. He recognized his own moment as “shaped by the sudden emergence of America as the repository of Western culture in a world overrun by Fascism,” which called for a “reawakening to America’s own tradition . . . in the light of a new—if frantically enforced—sense of world responsibility.”<sup>40</sup> In those formulations, Kazin seemed to embrace the new centeredness of America in the world and its centered identity. At times his rhetoric verged on celebration, but for the most part, his tone was unsentimental, signaling even more clearly than Matthiessen a critical distance from the very idea of a national culture and literature. After all, Kazin’s topic was the growth of “modern” literature from the 1890s to the 1940s, and he affirmed Matthew Arnold’s definition of the modern mentality as one of displacement, a keenly sensed “want of correspondence” between the given social and cultural forms of one’s life and one’s “actual life”—an experience of “terrible estrangement” or alienation occasioned by dizzying social and cultural changes. And in that condition, the very idea of “possessing” a national identity, culture, or literature would inevitably be marked by “perplexity.”

Kazin’s principal topic was the conjoint rise of “realism” and the vocation of “criticism,” from William Dean Howells through the literary naturalism of Theodore Dreiser and subsequently the interwar “lost generation” of expatriate writers. Kazin defined the driving purpose of literary realism as “the need to learn *what the reality of life was* in the modern era,” a task rendered problematic precisely by the “want of correspondence” Arnold had seen. Turn-of-the-century writers experienced industrial capitalism as genuinely a new, unknown world suddenly cut off from an “old America.” Sharing their sense of dislocation, Kazin regarded the enterprise of defining American literature as a national literature to be an ever-elusive quest: we “wonder a

little uneasily at times,” he wrote, “how deeply we possess [that literature], or *what it is* we do possess.”<sup>41</sup>

The tone shifted in Kazin’s final chapter—titled “America! America!”—that examined the “new nationalism” that flourished through the Depression and into the period of war and now “world responsibility.” The mood of American letters had changed dramatically from the “debunking” attitudes of the 1920s to the fervent “searching of our own culture” to “recover America *as an idea*,” which a reader could mistake Kazin for endorsing without question.<sup>42</sup> Yet even in his discussion of the new folklore studies or the recording of folk songs, the Works Progress Administration state guides Kazin so admired, the documentary impulse in photography and film, the profusion of biographies of great Americans, Kazin’s skepticism persisted: “America” or “American culture” remained hard to grasp. Henry James had remarked on “our not knowing, of society’s not knowing” what resided at the heart of things. Likewise, James Rorty in the 1930s “was moved to confess that he did not know what America was. . . . No. No one knew.” For the most part, Kazin hailed national self-searching precisely for the indefiniteness of that quest, “always seeking to catch reality on the run.”<sup>43</sup> If there was such a thing as “America,” we did not “possess” it. Kazin recognized the new striving to identify a “national center” as a yearning that could yield works of beauty but typically shaded off “into the unabashed recovery of an American mythology.” Already, Kazin regretted “the panicky call to action and conformism” that led writers like his early hero Van Wyck Brooks, “a critic who was fundamentally no longer interested in criticism,” to assail modernist estrangement and “become . . . the celebrator of a national tradition.” Finally, Kazin wrote, he would leave it “for the Axis Ministers of Culture . . . to impose an external unity upon culture.” For himself, defining a national culture stumbled on the fact that no one (individually or collectively) could “see it all.” There was no single pattern; “there were patterns for all.” The very wartime crisis of the moment—“this moment of climacteric” when “the world seems to be waiting, waiting for its new order”—reinforced the constitutive elusiveness of the quest.<sup>44</sup> What *was* “American” when the American scene was so much in flux?

### “Our Country and Our Culture”

*Partisan Review* (PR) was peculiarly well suited to probe what its editors called in 1952 “a reaffirmation and rediscovery of America,” a tide that had turned as “many writers and intellectuals now feel closer to their country and its culture.” This despite a heritage dating back, as Kazin had said, to the beginnings of modernism and the posture of the artist or critic who was alien to “a national

mind” closed to anything but “property and profits.” A slight, book-shaped quarterly whose spare, modernist cover design appeared almost handmade, *PR* had emerged on the margins, starting as the organ of a Communist literary club in 1934, recast in 1937 as a far-left journal independent of the Communist Party and critical, from the left, of Russia’s Stalinist regime and its American supporters. Its editors and principal writers mocked the crudeness and sentimentality of Popular Front culture, regarded themselves as cosmopolitan modernists, even for a time revolutionary internationalists, and initially at least, opponents of the wartime chauvinism that threatened to usher in a totalitarian American state. By 1941–1942, most but not all of its key writers and editors had chosen to support the war effort. By the late 1940s, their anti-Stalinism came to meld with the anticommunism of Cold War America, setting them more or less uncomfortably within the new national consensus, albeit with a range of left-leaning reservations. *PR* aligned itself with the Congress of Cultural Freedom, an international organization (revealed years later to have been backed by the new Central Intelligence Agency) and its American adjunct, the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, both organizations intended to rally writers, artists, and intellectuals in a common front against “totalitarianism” in the guise of global Communism.

The ferocious tenor of the battle between *PR*’s anti-Stalinists and those who retained sympathies with the Communist Party was unmistakable by the end of 1948, when the young socialist and literary critic Irving Howe published his slashing attack on Matthiessen, “our outstanding literary fellow-traveler.” Some months later, in March 1949, Howe joined a *PR* contingent that crashed an international peace conference at New York’s Waldorf Astoria hotel where prominent Soviet figures like composer Shostakovich joined American allies such as Matthiessen. The interlopers intended to challenge this latter-day Popular Front exercise by assailing Stalin’s brutal suppression of cultural freedom. As yet, a number of these anti-Stalinists like Howe held out for a “third camp” in world affairs opposed equally to Soviet Communism and US imperialism, but after another year passed—and two months after Matthiessen’s suicide—the United States was at war in Korea and most of *PR*’s American writers were on the side of “our country.” Two years later, it was time to reflect on the nature of that allegiance.

Running through three numbers of *PR*, “Our Country and Our Culture” featured the reflections of twenty-four prominent writers and critics seeking to make sense of the new mood of acceptance of and belonging within American culture. It was a striking feature of its time that of those twenty-four, no writers of color appeared in the symposium, and there was only one woman, Louise Bogan, poetry editor at the *New Yorker*.<sup>45</sup>

Contributors to the symposium dwelled on the deprovincializing of American culture. The poet and past editor of the Communist-aligned *New Masses*, Horace Gregory, wrote of the contemporary artist and writer, “The center of whatever world he can conceive of—for the time being at least—is the United States, and Europe is its museum” (438). More than a relocation of cultural resources to North American shores, the United States had overcome its provincialism by moving beyond what earlier critics had denounced as the “thinness” of American culture. Now there appeared a new conviction that learning and art appreciation counted for something and thus that the philistinism mocked in the 1920s by the leading satirist H. L. Mencken no longer reigned. Lionel Trilling averred that “art and thought are more generally and happily received and recognized—if not wholly loved—than they have ever been in America” (321), in part as a result of growing prosperity, communications media, and universities that all fostered a “newly expanded intellectual class,” a “large intellectual elite” that he welcomed (321–22). Usually considered a representative of high modernism, even Trilling saw a democratic thrust to “the increased power of mind in the nation.” There was reason to hope that “mass culture . . . might become a better thing than it now is, that it might attract genius” (322). Like David Riesman, Trilling insisted that “America” was becoming in the process something quite different than it had been. Perhaps America was “coming of age” at last.

A fair number of dissenters professed no such optimism; yet almost no one doubted that one could make judgments about “America” and “American culture” as a whole. Only Howe firmly resisted the holistic premise: “Need we really lose ourselves in such immensities as ‘America’? Must one hate or love such a grab-bag of abstractions as ‘America’? . . . When the *PR* editors report that writers now ‘want very much to be part of American life,’ I cannot react with enthusiasm or distaste until I am told *which part* of American life” (580). Sociologist C. Wright Mills declined to reflect on intellectuals’ proclivity to either “alienation” from or “acceptance” of “our country”—in part because he claimed to adhere to a cultural internationalism (which he named “the West”).

These reservations notwithstanding, what is striking in retrospect is the *negative* uniformity of most contributions, in terms of what was *not* said. No one even mentioned “our Negro population” until Max Lerner did so one hundred pages into the symposium; no one explicitly mentioned the ongoing Korean War despite a rate of some forty-five US deaths per day. Only the most vigorous radicals spoke about the US “war economy,” including novelist Norman Mailer, who warned that “total war and the total war economy predicate[s] a total regimentation of thought.” Mills argued the



main problem of his time was the disappearance of a “movement or party having a chance to influence the course of affairs” in the direction of real change; Howe concurred that socialist movements had died, even though world capitalism, in his view, was still, ultimately, doomed.

Nothing united the contributors so much as their endorsement of the anti-Soviet role of the United States in the world. Even Howe confessed that he no longer “settle[d] on an isle of rectitude equidistant from both sides” (577); Mailer and Mills appeared to be the only ones who still withheld assent. Otherwise, even as quite a few decried the “restrictive” atmosphere of the Red Scare, most participants emphasized how the country had “matured,” achieving a new density of social and cultural institutions that might foster a new literary culture.

Surprisingly, given the “reaffirmation” of American belonging that most contributors avowed, quite a few contributors claimed their moment was marked by artistic “stasis,” what Louise Brogan called a lack of “fresh creative activity.” Even Philip Rahv, one of the symposium’s conveners, remarked, “The rout of the left-wing movement has depoliticized literature—which is not necessarily a bad thing in itself if the political motive had been not simply abandoned but creatively displaced by a root-idea of a different order. No such idea having emerged so far, what is to be observed now is a kind of detachment from principle and fragmentation of the literary life” (309). Similarly, Mary McCarthy writing for *PR* as a theater critic complained that “the stage presents such a spectacle of confusion, disintegration and despair that no generalization can cover the case”—this amid the beginning of Tennessee Williams’s and Arthur Miller’s careers and during what is now recognized as the heyday of American musical theater. The creative ferment of abstract expressionism, modern architecture, avant-garde dance, and other American artistic movements that attracted international attention were strangely absent from contributors’ assessments of their country and their culture.

Examining what was absent from *PR*’s symposium sheds further light on the problem of defining American culture or finding within it a place of belonging. A few months earlier, the African American novelist James Baldwin, as yet only twenty-seven years old, wrote in *PR*, “The story of the Negro in America is the story of America—or more precisely, it is the story of Americans. It is not a very pretty story.” Baldwin captured all the weirdness of the “Our Culture” discussion by addressing the “things unsaid” there, that is, the story, he wrote, “which no American is prepared to hear.”<sup>46</sup> And Baldwin, in his essay titled “Many Thousands Gone,” did not *relate* that story so much as allude to it as something unrelatable. The essay addresses Bigger Thomas, the protagonist of Richard Wright’s 1941 novel *Native Son*,

who in Baldwin's view never appears to the reader as a knowable person but figures instead as the image of "simple, naked and unanswerable hatred" (for what "Negro living in America," Baldwin asks, "has not wanted to smash any white face he may encounter in a day"), nurtured by the relentless "dehumanization of the Negro [that] is indivisible from our dehumanization of ourselves."<sup>47</sup> Baldwin's use of the first-person plural is disconcerting: "Our dehumanization" refers to "we" Americans in the strange voice Baldwin maintained throughout his essay: "Americans" always are cited in the first person—"we" and "our"—while "the Negro" figures always in the third person, "he," as if Baldwin himself was "American" and *not* black. These are the signals of that irresolvable strangeness, of belonging and not belonging, that Baldwin ascribes to African Americans: *of* but not *in* the country because they are both excluded and yet the same as the country itself, constituting the only "true story" to tell about America. Throughout his early essays Baldwin constantly recognized "schisms in the mind" that reflect such coincident opposites.<sup>48</sup> In his view, Wright had failed "to convey any sense of Negro life as a continuing and complex group reality," just as Bigger remained "blank." But this in a way spoke to the truth the novel conveyed in spite of its other flaws, for the nation's "identity" remains blank, "annulled," so long as the myth of the free and the brave effaced the violence and oppression of the American past.<sup>49</sup>

Baldwin persistently probed the moral vacuity of American identity and culture. "The Negro in America," he wrote in his 1955 essay "Notes of a Native Son," is "native" to a culture that utterly denies his humanity, indeed his reality. And by making "the Negro" unknowable, the country establishes its single most definitive trait—its "innocence" (or denial)—and hence its inauthenticity. Baldwin offered his own definition of national culture, an "American psychology" whose inclination to denial made it impossible to acknowledge "the darkness which lies behind." Such acknowledgment was impossible, at least until that mentality "undergo[es] a metamorphosis so profound as to be literally unthinkable and which there is no doubt we will resist until we are compelled to achieve our own identity by the rigors of a time that has yet to come."<sup>50</sup>

For Baldwin, Americanism was not existent but yet to be "achieved." In keeping with the existentialist spirit of the time, Baldwin insisted that meaning is not to be found but to be made. In a meditation on his father's life as a man who was almost thoroughly bitter and cruel, Baldwin ended "Notes" by calling on himself to "hold in mind forever two ideas which seemed to be in opposition": "acceptance, totally without rancor, of life as it is" combined with the need nonetheless to fight the injustices of that life, with a "heart

free of hatred and despair.” That’s when this native son, knowing his “father was irrecoverable . . . wished that he had been beside me so that I could have searched his face for the answers which only the future would give me now.”<sup>51</sup>

An even more fugitive reflection on American culture and identity came from the black Marxist C. L. R. James as he fought a losing battle to stop his deportation from the United States as an undesirable alien. Interned on Ellis Island, James wrote a manuscript that was only published posthumously in 1993 as *American Civilization*. Here a radical critic and revolutionary socialist undertook the same venture in national definition that so many others had in the midcentury surge of cultural nation-building. The book had any number of curious but provocative features. For a writer who cherished his own classical education and dealt in the complexities of Hegel’s logic, his focus aimed not so much on the “high arts” but instead on the “low”—the cartoon strip and the popular Hollywood movie. Intellectual life in the 1950s more frequently dwelled on the dangers of “mass culture,” a recurrent theme in “Our Country and Our Culture.” The editors posted the question bluntly: “Must the American intellectual and writer adapt himself to mass culture? . . . Do you believe that a democratic society necessarily leads to a leveling of culture, to a mass culture which will overrun intellectual and aesthetic values traditional to Western civilization?” For the editors, the defense of “high culture” was a defining feature of the “critical nonconformism” they identified with Thoreau and Melville. Nonetheless, most respondents were less alarmed. As Newton Arvin put it, “The culture of the modern masses has not yet ‘crush[ed] beneath it everything that is different.’” *PR*’s publisher hailed “the one great new *popular* art, potentially the finest art form ever devised, the talking motion picture.” Even Rahv conceded there was “positive value” in “some types of jazz and the folklore of sport for instance.”<sup>52</sup> In fact, the contributors most hostile to mass culture were those few who held most strictly to professions of radical dissent.

Indeed, popular arts at the time drew more respectful attention from serious writers than the reputation of high-modernist “mass culture criticism” allows, in part due to the process of “recentering” that brought not only gallery culture away from Paris to New York City but also the heart of movie culture to the United States. The great film cultures of Europe (the early Soviet cinema, Weimar Germany, and France) had suffered terribly from political repression and the war’s devastation. Undiminished by the war, the American studios surged into the world market, happy to circulate American movies abroad while supporting, at the new Cannes film festival, foreign efforts at reconstruction. The stark “neorealism” of postwar Italian cinema especially attracted American filmmakers’ attention. Even the structural changes disturbing the

film industry, just as television began to erode the regular moviegoing audience, had positive effects in concentrating critical attention on film. The age of great movie palaces began their decline during the Depression while smaller, independent theaters proliferated around New York City, where a new breed of sophisticated “cinephiles” like the writers Dwight Macdonald and James Agee became regulars.<sup>53</sup> In San Francisco, the same early 1950s trend captured a young writer, Pauline Kael, who reached a national audience in the 1960s.

One postwar critic who “confessed” to compulsive movie watching, Robert Warshow, claimed that it was not necessary to dignify movies as “art” in order to register their distinctive qualities. In keeping with the liberal anticommunism of the era, Warshow warned alternately about the Communist role in the culture industries lowering aesthetic standards and about the fascist impulses of an uncultured mass. A very different intellectual with ties to the Communist milieu, psychiatrist Fredric Wertham also saw fascist connotations to the superhero and horror strain of American comic books.<sup>54</sup> Warshow acknowledged many of Wertham’s concerns but was intent on taking popular culture away from the Popular Front. He shared enough with the high modernist milieu to lament the slack character of the country’s culture but turned around to recognize in the movies—and in comic strips too—a salutary “immediacy” that impelled a direct encounter with “experience” not yet stripped of vitality by slogans or sentiment.<sup>55</sup>

Warshow did not hanker for empirical “realism”—indeed, he often sneered at “social realism” in popular arts—but admired instead those artistic forms that tapped deep and ambiguous anxieties underlying the felt experience of modern life. The gangster movie, Warshow wrote, achieved the status of art despite its formulaic narrative of the criminal’s rise and fall because it adopted a tragic view of life in the modern city. Like other critics of competitive individualism in his time, Warshow argued, “In the deeper layers of the modern consciousness . . . every attempt to succeed is an act of aggression, leaving one alone and guilty.” As the gangster antihero dies alone at the end of the movie, so the viewer senses that “one is *punished* for success,” for “success is evil and dangerous, is—ultimately—impossible.” The Western movie, “an art form for connoisseurs,” set modern dilemmas instead in an imagined frontier landscape. There, in a quieter tragedy than the gangster film, Warshow saw lonely men striving to preserve their “noble” individuality but always morally compromised and defeated by their gun-slinging violence, even when deployed on the “right” side. At best, the Western hero showed the capacity to control his use of violence according to his own style and character, a salve for the modern anxiety over violence of mass proportions, impersonal and out of control.<sup>56</sup>

In a very different mode, C. L. R. James situated popular culture within a holistic analysis of the country's movement in time. He self-consciously joined the authors who were stirred by "the rise of America to world-power" to "grasp the essence of the American civilization," and he chose to root his idea of America in a literary analysis of Melville and Whitman, acknowledging Matthiessen's influence.<sup>57</sup> Contrary to Baldwin, James adopted a Gunnar Myrdal-like notion of the American creed: "Liberty, freedom, pursuit of happiness, free individuality had an actuality and a meaning in America which they had nowhere else" and remained "the most vital tradition in the country today." And in line with the enthusiasms of his day, he credited Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* as "the finest study of the United States ever written" and one he sought to emulate. He was not averse to "exceptionalist" arguments, devoting himself to demonstrate what it was in America "that the world did not [otherwise] know."<sup>58</sup>

Yet James chose also to give the search for "America" a unique twist, often finding in its history the precise opposite of what most commentators saw. It wasn't the pronouncements of Founding Fathers that stood for the country's profound originality: those merely gave "clearest expression" to an ideology of individualism already common to eighteenth-century Europe—a creed betrayed by "the organizers of the state" and the slave masters of the South. Rather, "the first great independent expression of the American genius is the Abolition Movement" of Garrison, Phillips, and Douglass—the beginning of something James thought rare in Europe, that is, modern "mass movements, uprisings of the people and unofficial individuals." In James's view, Matthiessen's American Renaissance gained its strength from the assault of mass energies against the "conspiracy of silence" that characterized an antebellum republic insistent on sustaining the slave regime. That conspiracy was the real root of the conformist tendencies Tocqueville found in the United States. On the other hand, the "altogether exceptional capacity for free association" that Tocqueville admired was most evident in the abolitionists' invention of the modern mass movement. That movement, in James's Hegelian vision, produced not a mass of deracinated loners but instead a radically new fusion of "individuality and universality" that gave American "democracy" its world significance.<sup>59</sup>

James's capacious view of "culture" saw no great divide between the poet Whitman and the agitator Wendell Phillips, between published verse and mass protest. Yet Whitman, he thought, could not *realize* the union of individuality and universality, however much the national revival of 1861 stirred his yearning for union with his fellows. Whitman's vision was abstract in its glorification of the individual while Melville's was concrete in his analysis of

a polyglot ship's crew sharing some degree of solidarity, a world of workmen and "savages" in the global industry of whaling that James could not help view as anticipation of a rising tide of color in the mid-twentieth century.

The world historical meaning of American culture became evident, too, in the great shift of modern industry toward consolidation that Melville had glimpsed. The "old heroic individualist America" that Whitman still took at face value was at that moment "breeding a new individualism, an individualism which would destroy society." The concentrated power of tyrannical leaders (symbolized by Ahab) emerged in the form of the new "captains of industry" and then twentieth-century totalitarians. But for James, Melville's dark vision only hinted at the other great American contribution to world history: mass production, which James saw as enabling the mass uprisings evidenced in his time by the CIO and by industrial workers who he thought, in 1950, were still restive against the regimentation of the capitalist factory.

At this point, James shifted his textual analysis from Whitman and Melville to the social science of "industrial relations" that he believed had recognized modern industry's core problem—the unsatisfied yearning of the worker for humane work and recognition—but as yet had no idea of how to address it. American society and culture, he wrote, had "arrived at an impasse," where only "the entertainment industry" accurately expressed "the tensions and deep crises of American society." In the comic strip, detective story, gangster movie, and more, James found expressions of popular distrust of official pieties, defiance of authority, violent rage at the suppression of individuality, and vicarious fulfillment in dreams of happiness—all authentic expressions of mass dissatisfaction under the given regime. This was not the passive conformity imposed by a manipulative culture industry but a restive, resentful mood that commercial entertainment, dependent on paying customers, had to address, albeit within the limits of present social order. Absent a present and practical route to a future, socialist reality, the typical product of mass culture could only be the expression of an "armed truce."<sup>60</sup>

Even within those limits, the audience represented for James a new kind of "modern individuality . . . an individuality which can express itself only in common with thousands of others." Mass entertainment opened the prospect of a new renaissance by offering media in which "great artists . . . [as] great artists always have done, will simplify and dramatize and attack the emotions as well as the intellect with dramatizations of the great problems," in arts "inextricably tied to the realities of the day." He remained confident that Americans could, by expressing their deepest and utterly contemporary impulses, infuse those media with force and passion. "In *social* culture, technical knowledge, sense of equality, the instinct for social cooperation and

collective life, the need to live a full life in every sphere and a revulsion to submission [and] to accepting a social situation as insoluble, they are the most highly civilized people on the face of the globe.”<sup>61</sup>

C. L. R. James was always concerned with great historic transitions, when the old society was in process of giving way to the new. Like the critical “consensus” historians, he believed that “the old America is gone”; the new was yet unrealized but still embedded in the mass sentiment signaled by the popular arts and aimed at achieving free individuality for all. In the militant unionists on strike from 1945–1947 he saw “the spirit, the solidarity and the defiance of society as a whole” that was “American to the core.” He also saw a spark of change, yet to come, in the strivings for freedom of “the Negroes” and of women impatient with the domination of men. All this combined in new visions of sociability woven into the ways of the American masses, who were anything but inert. If intellectuals mimicked European elites in their scorn for popular American culture, they simply failed to grasp how far the new had already eroded the old. James held to a crazy optimism, unwilling as yet to concede that the political tides of the Cold War would subdue the mass labor movement and suppress utopian aspirations.

How ironic that this strange friend of the American masses was just then to be deported, dubbed an undesirable alien, wrapped in the shadow of the period’s booming Americanism—that is, consigned to the category of the un-American.

## CHAPTER THREE



# History and Antihistoricism

The “French existentialists” made a splash in the United States soon after the liberation of Paris, when the editor of the resistance organ *Combat*, Albert Camus, suggested Jean-Paul Sartre write for the newspaper about the American scene. Sartre toured the country in the early months of 1945; Camus himself followed in 1946; and Simone de Beauvoir spent four months in the United States in early 1947. Translations of their writings appeared in respectable monthlies like the *Atlantic*, the fashion magazine *Vogue*, as well as the little political and literary magazines *Partisan Review* and *politics*. However caricatured as bohemians wallowing in a “bleak philosophy,” heroicized as resistance fighters, or mocked as a passing fad, the visitors lectured at colleges and universities around the country—de Beauvoir especially at the women’s colleges of Vassar, Wellesley, Smith, and Mills, but also at Berkeley, Rice, Rochester, and Columbia—and their work received concerted attention as philosophy by 1948. Marjorie Grene, an American who had heard Martin Heidegger’s lectures at Freiburg in 1931, published *Dreadful Freedom: A Critique of Existentialism* in 1948. That same year Hazel Barnes, later a renowned translator of Sartre, took up the subject in response to a college student’s question, “What is this Existentialism everybody is talking about?” Of the French visitors, Camus arguably had the most immediate impact, due to his 1946 New York lectures that dwelled on the meaning of the war, totalitarianism, and the future left in their wake. His essay, “Neither Victims nor Executioners,” translated by *politics* editor Dwight Macdonald and published in English a year later, called on intellectuals to “demonstrate that



this era marks the end of ideologies, that is of absolute Utopias which destroy themselves, in History, by the price they ultimately exact” in mass atrocities. “We cannot ‘escape History,’ since we are in it up to our necks. But one may propose to fight within History to preserve from History that part of man which is not its proper province.”<sup>1</sup>

Although they were prone to talk in universalist terms of the “human condition,” Camus, Sartre, and de Beauvoir could not have ignored history. Another early American translator, Bernard Frechtman, insisted that Sartre’s philosophy “is immediately involved in the peculiar confusions that beset *this* generation in all aspects of *its* civilization.”<sup>2</sup> But they definitely distrusted (capital-H) History. They were linked, as Camus’s injunctions suggest, to a broader move from relativist to more universalist propositions, and away from historicism to capture enduring features of human experience, so-called permanent concerns of mankind.<sup>3</sup> The notion that human social relations are in constant flux, varying over time, lost its appeal to many observers. Recoiling from “totalitarianism,” the catastrophic violence and destruction of World War II, and particularly from Stalinism, many writers assailed trust in History understood as a force carrying events and people toward great ends—a telos that served, critics said, as a pretext for rationalizing great crimes or justifying sacrifices as the unavoidable costs of promised achievements yet to come. *That* notion of “history,” allegedly emblematic of modern, fearsome “ideologies,” was roundly condemned, though far from vanquished in American thought and culture.

It wasn’t only the determinism of such visions of history that seemingly wrought horrors; critics also suspected the situational relativism of historical consciousness—the sense that one moment in time was marked by a particular character unlike other times, and that human actions, and dispositions, could take highly variable forms in distinct circumstances. Taking one’s distance from the idea of a linear, progressive course of history implied a new emphasis on morality as a guide to choice and action—with morality understood as transcendent, unaltered in its standards and imperatives by the vicissitudes of change. Reorientation toward that which endured and was somehow *fundamental* to human experience was another, midcentury centering move.

A preoccupation with historicity and the experience of time took many forms and drew various kinds of critique. While the changefulness of historicity lost appeal in yearnings for permanence, other critics might embrace changefulness itself—understood as all that is inconstant in human life—as a way of stepping outside of time, of exempting oneself from the force of present circumstance. One would refuse historical determinism in order to

discover new kinds of human freedom straining against the “cages” of time. In midcentury American thought and culture, many reasons surfaced for challenging historical temporality.

This is not to say that antihistoricism always prevailed. Historians were at work; the ranks of their profession grew in the expanding universities, and American practitioners continued to broaden the range of their expertise in the histories of a great many places and periods. Even “grand history” continued to have substantial appeal. The British historian Arnold J. Toynbee and the Americans Will and Ariel Durant remained engaged in writing their multivolume chronicles, *The Study of History* and *The Story of Civilizations* respectively. At a more reflective, methodological level, cultural theorists such as Kenneth Burke promoted the cultivation of historical consciousness. The poets John Berryman and Robert Lowell wrote verse soaked in a sense of the American past.

Despite the antihistoricist turn, many American thinkers reinvigorated a progressive vision of modernity, albeit shorn of some of the most invidious judgments that the older Western “civilization” had cast on “backward,” presumably inferior peoples. American culture generally roused itself from the civilizational catastrophe of the world wars to restore a forward vision of “modernization” expected to come to completion in the coming decades. The midcentury revolt against historicism was qualified, limited, perhaps even half-hearted. It was a potent element in contemporary thought but not an all-conquering one.

### **Historicism in the Marx Debates of the 1930s and Beyond**

During the 1930s, the eminent literary critic Edmund Wilson thought seriously about the nature and meaning of history—and by the end of that decade he would sketch some key points in an emerging critique of historicism. Like his friend Kenneth Burke, Wilson had started out in the 1920s as a formalist concerned with literary style, particularly the avant-garde modes of expression that by then had come to be known as “modernism,” the subject of Wilson’s first major work, *Axel’s Castle*, in 1931. As the 1930s unfolded, the turmoil of economic crisis, the rising danger of fascism, and what some observers thought was the promise of Soviet communism turned Wilson’s attention to the great changes afoot, the course that history might take on its own or the means by which people make it. All those matters figured in his monumental 1940 book *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History*, whose title referred to the return of the revolutionary V. I. Lenin to Petrograd’s train station in April 1917 in preparation for the

Bolshevik seizure of power some six months later. Some twenty years later, Wilson and other American intellectuals who had once embraced some version of communism as an answer to capitalism's economic collapse began to register their disenchantment with Stalin's Russia. Registering the new sober mood, Wilson took a critical view of the notions of history making and "historicism" that ran, according to his account, from the French Revolution to Lenin's dramatic intervention in the course of events.

It was the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) who first outlined principles of historicism as one of the "new sciences" of Enlightenment, Wilson explained: humans, not gods or mythic forces, had by their past actions shaped the course of social life in all its forms and institutions. And while those past actors had the same basic mental equipment as ourselves (for only then could we understand them *as* actors), the new science recognized that "they" inhabited their *own* world (not ours) as it was shaped *in and by* history. Yes, history had a kind of order and lawfulness: "The nature of things is nothing other than that they come into being at certain times and in certain ways," Vico wrote, and "wherever the same circumstances are present, the same phenomena arise and no others." But Wilson emphasized Vico's "organic" view of history: from certain origins and under definite circumstances, distinctive historical frames of experience took shape, representing in each case a given "world" that must be understood in its own terms. According to Wilson, Vico's new science was picked up by one of the great early historians of the French Revolution, Jules Michelet; but another historicist, Hegel, came to have much greater influence, particularly through the work of Karl Marx.<sup>4</sup>

The precise relation between Hegel and Marx was one of the key preoccupations of left-wing American intellectuals in the 1930s. According to Hegel's "dialectical" philosophy, change in time was stirred by the clash of contrary principles starting with creative spirit, mind, or reason on the one hand and inert, creaturely matter on the other. A grand historical process moved through ascending stages of development toward a culminating synthesis of reason and reality, of thought and matter. For Hegel, the achievement of modern science and the self-conscious nation-state made that goal concrete in his own time, enabling humans to guide their affairs. Hegel's argument that the ubiquity of change led toward restoration of a whole, or "totality," counted as one of the grandest theories of Progress, recounting a steady advance from primordial beginnings toward a rational world civilization.

While a few American thinkers adopted Hegelian ideas, the pragmatist philosophers of the early twentieth century took their distance. John Dewey, whose long career stretched through the 1930s and 1940s (he died in 1952

at age ninety-two), had started with Hegel but came to reject an overarching Hegelian metaphysics. At the same time, Hegel had left a “permanent deposit” in Dewey’s ideas, according to philosopher Morton G. White. Hegelian notions survived in the primacy of change making that Dewey ascribed to the scientific mentality and in the vision of wholeness that inspired Dewey’s anticipation of a democratic community knit together by fluent communication. The older of the great pragmatists, William James, held a far harsher view of Hegel as the exponent of an imperious philosophy positing a “block universe” where chance and choice had no place. In still a different vein, Dewey’s most devoted student, Sidney Hook, worked throughout the 1930s to defend a notion of dialectical change in Marx’s theory of history that descended from but broke away from Hegel’s. In Hook’s view, Marx’s dialectical change stood closer, in fact, to Dewey’s notion of experimental action in time. Marx offered a testable and falsifiable hypothesis, rather than a prophecy of “inevitability,” that revolutionary workers’ movements had the potential to transform modern capitalism into an egalitarian, democratic society of socialism.<sup>5</sup>

Wilson’s *Finland Station* stood at a turning point for left-wing American pragmatists such as Hook who tried to rid Marxism of its Hegelian elements, for Wilson contended that those elements were so built in that Marxism itself had to be surrendered. The question, to be sure, was not finally settled. On the eve of US entry to World War II, the German émigré Marxist Herbert Marcuse published a vindication of Hegel titled *Reason and Revolution*: the principle of contradiction recognized the complexity of any given state of things, including forces that “negated” existing conditions. The priority Hegel gave to “spirit,” in Marcuse’s rendition, suggest the persistence of critical reason militating against the irrationality of social existence and holding open the possibility of revolutionary movements for human emancipation. Others in Marcuse’s milieu, the so-called Frankfurt School of theorists exiled in the United States, reached a more pessimistic conclusion by the late 1940s: advanced capitalist states had assumed an effective control of economy and culture that suppressed all contradiction and critique. C. L. R. James offered still another perspective, arguing that American civilization remained a *moving* totality, wherein insurgent masses had the capacity to create a genuine democratic collectivism.

Aside from the Marxists, other figures, too, brought historicist dispositions to bear in American intellectual life. Carl Becker (1873–1945), one of the Progressive Era’s “New Historians,” whose career crested in the 1930s, adopted many of the arguments of the best known historicist thinker at the time, the Neapolitan and Hegelian philosopher Benedetto Croce. Historians

must grasp “particular events [of the past] in their concreteness,” in their lived context, Croce argued, echoing Vico. That meant capturing the way historical actors understood themselves, their actions, and the great problems they faced. These were the features that made a historical “moment”—a favored Crocean term—what it was: a coherent world of experience to the actors within it.<sup>6</sup> In these notions lay a kind of relativism that Becker would declare boldly in a 1935 address titled, “Everyman His Own Historian.” For Croce, “All true history must be re-lived or re-experienced by the historian; ascertaining ‘facts’ and interpreting or judging them were part of the same process of imaginative re-creation.”<sup>7</sup> Insofar as historians occupied their *own* unique “moment,” they inevitably grasped the distinctive character of the past in terms related to their own present concerns. Could their work of “re-creation” be judged accurate in knowing the past as it was, a sure form of knowledge that “scientific historians” claimed to uncover? Not for Becker: knowledge conveyed by the historian was inevitably partial, never absolute in its fidelity to a past objectively known, a view that scandalized an old guard of American historians.<sup>8</sup>

Historicism would enter American intellectual life in other guises too. By the 1950s, another German Jewish émigré to the United States, Erich Auerbach, helped establish the field of comparative literature in the United States, basing his *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* on Vico’s “theory of historical coherence.” All aspects of human society at a particular time and place had a certain character in common, Auerbach insisted: “Each age has its own method or optic.”<sup>9</sup> As the comparativist Edward Said wrote later, Auerbach learned from Vico to interpret literature “from the point of view of the [historical] author, whose relationship to his age was an organic and integral one, a kind of self-making within the context of the specific dynamics of society at a very precise moment in its development.”<sup>10</sup>

### **The Revolt Against Historicism in the Age of Totalitarianism**

Even as Auerbach wrote his masterwork, a new mood in American intellectual life tended to consider such views relativistic and incompatible with scientific standards of objectivity. Too much emphasis on the variation of historical “moments” threatened to rob moral judgment of its efficacy: human actions would escape censure simply because they were considered “of their time.” The historian Edward Purcell has noted how many midcentury American thinkers, reeling from revelations of war crimes committed by “totalitarian” states, sought to recover standards of judgment deemed “ab-

solute.”<sup>11</sup> The seeming “cultural relativism” of pluralist anthropology came under attack, and historians veered toward more empiricist notions that the past could (and should) be described as it really was by meticulous scientific, “objective” scholarship—even if most postwar historians would shy away from claiming they were utterly “disinterested.” The example of totalitarian states “rewriting history” to suit their ideological aims seemed to demand respect for given fact. Thus one could certainly value *historical* scholarship while spurning *historicism*.

The revolt against historicism cannot be understood apart from the concept of “totalitarianism,” which began to flourish as a new term of political analysis around the time of Wilson’s *Finland Station*—in the wake of Hitler’s remilitarization of Germany and Stalin’s purge trials of 1936–1939. Several writers began to identify Nazi and Communist regimes as exemplary cases of a single new phenomenon—totalitarianism—even though the two claimed to be mortal enemies and polar opposites. The sudden, shocking announcement on August 23, 1939, of the Non-Aggression Pact between Germany and Russia seemed to confirm the idea that the political poles of Left and Right circled around to meet in a common type. When the pact broke in 1941—leading Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union to forge a “Big Three” alliance waging a “democratic” struggle against Germany and Japan—the concept lost prominence. After the war ended and the Cold War took shape, however, America’s new adversary, the Soviet Union, was again customarily identified with the defeated Nazi regime as the totalitarian opposite of democracy, the rival of “the free world.” As observers confronted the mind-numbing facts of Nazi genocide, as well as new evidence of Soviet mass prison camps (circulated in 1949 by a French leftist and survivor of German concentration camps, David Rousset), the concept took hold.

Hannah Arendt’s monumental work of 1951, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, gave the concept its most thorough treatment and its most influential meaning. This large and dense book consisted of three sequential parts tracked over time, starting with “Antisemitism,” moving on to “Imperialism,” and concluding with “Totalitarianism” itself. Set against the long history of Jew hatred in Christian Europe, modern anti-Semitism of the sort the Nazis propounded had a distinct character recognizable in political movements sprouting in the late nineteenth century. Arendt also claimed that the kinds of brutality and mass murder practiced by European colonialists—especially the Germans in Africa—then became a prototype for genocide in Europe, as colonial violence boomeranged from the outer to the inner realm of the empire.

In the third part, “Totalitarianism,” Arendt presented a kind of historical context for Nazism and Stalinism (though dwelling mostly on the former).

She began by describing the “breakdown” of “bourgeois-dominated class society” that ushered in “a classless society”—not in the egalitarian, democratic sense forecast by revolutionary socialists but rather an order of “mass men” who had lost all concrete ties to families, vocational groups, or class organizations and were rendered “atomized,” unconnected, and at the same time lacking any meaningful individuality. Characterized by a sense of “superfluosness,” such beings were incapable of acting as “citizens.” They had no links to the conventional political parties advancing particular interests but instead sought security by joining a “mass movement” dominated by a “leader.” Unable either to “act” in a responsible or meaningful way, or to bear the inevitable uncertainty of human existence, such mass men identified wholly with the movement.

The movement’s totalitarian ideology “explained” all history and events by a fierce “logic,” offering a vision of lockstep destiny where every episode in the movement’s progress was linked to all others, every constituent principle of belief deduced from another, and every act justified as necessary in an overall scheme of movement triumph. Yet such ideology had the remarkable ability to shift radically, to justify any “change of line” and any crime the movement required. In the grip of such ideologies, mass men proved willing to act out their own superfluosness by offering their lives as a sacrifice for the cause; they fully inhabited a “fictitious world” created by the ideological logic of the movement’s vision of destiny. Ultimately, this was no existence at all: cut off from “reality” and “experience” by absorption in ideological logic, fatally divorced from the actual consequences of action, they lacked any understanding of moral responsibility. In the end, the mass man was no different from “the living dead,” those creatures merely awaiting extermination in the death camps.<sup>12</sup>

In her own way, Arendt offered a curious mix of historicity and antihistoricism. On the one hand, she found the source of this way of life in actual historical phenomena: “superfluosness” arose from two sources, first the experience of the “front generation,” the soldiers and veterans of World War I for whom trench warfare and mass death induced a deeply cynical disregard of all “ordinary” social life, of constituted authority and moral precepts, thus yielding both rage and “indifference” to life. And this experience of “the front” was compounded by the literal “superfluosness” of mass unemployment in the Great Depression. Yet Arendt showed limited interest in the historical explanation of how the “totalitarian” mass movements actually grew and achieved power. Rather, she sought to delineate the way of “being in the world” that issued from and fueled the totalitarian movement as such. While in some sense psychological, Arendt’s method is more properly understood as existential and

phenomenological: what was it “like to be” a member of a totalitarian party, or a subject of the totalitarian state, or an inmate of the camps? Arendt indicted the “fictitious” world in which the creatures of totalitarianism dwelled, in which the absurdity of belief could be rendered “real” by hitherto unimaginable violence to reality itself. Thus, she wrote, “Jews would be exterminated like bedbugs (i.e., with poison gas),” for “if inmates are vermin, it is *logical* that they should be killed by poison gas.”<sup>13</sup> Arendt’s phenomenological portrait of totalitarian existence depicted a circular logic, whereby the “being” subject to totalitarianism and the totalitarian movement itself mutually constituted each other, and the imperious force of the movement was dedicated to making real, by force, the fantastic illusions it propounded.

In the end, the history that led to the seizure of power and cultivation of totalitarian order was itself superfluous to the phenomenology of totalitarian existence. And in contemplating that existence, Arendt suggested, one realized that almost all traits of humanness (to think, to act, to judge) were expunged. Hence the “radical evil” of totalitarianism lay across some unbridgeable divide from everything we are accustomed to recognize as human experience. Those depredations resided somewhere beyond history, in a demonic realm with no analogues in familiar human social life.

In many ways, the theory of totalitarianism itself came to play an active part in constituting the intellectual life of the postwar period, driving the logic of the Red Scare as it bore down on American schools and universities, pressuring them to expel suspected Communists. In the past, teachers and professors had suffered dismissal for avowing unpopular, usually left-wing, political views, and in response, groups like the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), founded in 1915, had declared principles of academic freedom to protect the pursuit of knowledge from political vendettas waged by powers outside academic life. Yet those principles faced a distinctive challenge as early as the “little red scare” of 1940 to 1941, which led to the firing of a hundred suspected Communists from schools and colleges in New York. The issue returned after the war, notably in California, when anticommunist state legislators mandated a loyalty oath, which disclaimed membership in any subversive organizations, for all faculty at the University of California beginning in 1949. While most faculty members complied, several dozen refused to sign and were forced to seek college jobs in other states. Meanwhile, the University of Washington in Seattle dismissed three allegedly Communist professors, and the AAUP and the elite group of administrators, the Association of American Universities (AAU), commenced deliberations on the status of academic freedom and its applicability to Communism.



Although the instigators of academic witch hunts were often garden-variety conservatives hostile to dissent in general, a good part of the academic world concluded that Communist Party members were indeed “unfit” to teach. Such was the view of Sidney Hook, by the early 1950s a fierce anticommunist who also considered himself heir to a modern tradition that regarded persecution of unorthodox belief to be a bygone “medieval” evil. Thus Hook famously drew a fundamental distinction, arguing that while “heresy” (like Galileo’s views silenced by the Inquisition) deserved protection, “conspiracy” did not. And, to Hook, the Communist Party USA was nothing more or less than “conspiracy,” a compact of subversion. Indeed, in his view, Communism by its very nature was inconsistent with academic freedom itself, for members of a totalitarian party did *not* think for themselves but held always to the “party line” and thus were bound to act as agents of mass indoctrination. This perspective, which caricatured Communist intellectuals as automatons, was in fact not shared by Arendt, who thought the threat of Communist indoctrination was grossly exaggerated and that, if anything, the Red-hunters themselves represented a nearly totalitarian drive toward uniformity.<sup>14</sup>

### Jumping Out of History

The encounter with horrors deemed *sui generis*, hitherto unknown in human experience and demanding new principles to check them, resonated throughout Arendt’s time. Profound suspicion of grand projects promising social transformation—what Arendt regarded as the maniacal imagination to wholly reinvent social life—spread across the intellectual and political discourses. As Camus suggested in “Neither Victims Nor Executioners,” such grandiose “ideologies” typically justified political acts by allusion to the demands of “History,” imagined as an overpowering force that empowered leaders claiming prophetic insight into its operations.

Some of the keenest critics knew that this was not simply a trait of twentieth-century political and “totalitarian” ideologies but also of the most foundational notions of modernity, notably the concept of Progress bequeathed to the twentieth- by nineteenth-century notions of sociocultural evolution and scientific advance. Again, Progress with a capital “P” suggested something more than particular improvements in knowledge or technique but rather an overweening trend of all things in ascent—what “postmodernists” like Jean-Francois Lyotard would much later call “metanarratives.” Critics of such Progress emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, especially among dissenters from technological triumphalism (Emerson:

“The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet”) and Romantics who decried dehumanization (Schiller denounced the mechanical “clockwork” of modern society that valued habit more than genius). Yet in the mid-twentieth century, this sentiment gained new salience, especially among those who saw totalitarianism not so much as reactionary in its rejection of democracy but as a demonic fulfillment of modernity, evident in the technical expertise devoted to war production, the deployment of poison gas and other weapons of mass destruction, and the propagandistic use of mass communications.

The German Marxist theorist Max Horkheimer, having spent the Nazi years in exile in the United States, wrote *Dialectic of Enlightenment* with his close collaborator Theodor Adorno in 1944, while both were in Los Angeles. Nazism was not some primordial revolt against modernity, in their view. Instead the regime showed how “enlightenment”—the dynamic of change relying on science, technology, bourgeois freedom, and economic growth to assure humans “control over nature—yielded instead the totalitarian state’s ‘control over men.’” So Horkheimer also wrote in the late 1940s that human liberation in his time required not “the acceleration of progress [but] jumping out of progress.”<sup>15</sup> He might just as well have said it was necessary to “jump out of history.” Writing also in 1944, Lewis Mumford reached similarly dismal conclusions, as he watched the efficacy of US war production and later the atomic destruction of Japanese cities. “Under the cover of technical progress” of which Americans boasted, Mumford wrote, “There is no promise whatever of victory or even bare survival. . . . The external triumph of American machinery and arms will but hasten the downfall of the Western World.” That expectation of disaster, Mumford noted, would be borne out unless “a deep regeneration and renewal” occurred. Citing a saving remnant of hope in the late 1940s, Mumford joined campaigns advocating “world government.”<sup>16</sup>

Other radical American intellectuals moved to a clear and determined antihistoricism. Dwight Macdonald, a former Trotskyist increasingly interested in radical pacifism, devoted his little magazine *politics* to seeking “new roads” for left-wing criticism in the face of war and totalitarianism. Macdonald’s own view was decidedly downbeat. The great powers, those defeated as well as victorious, had come to resemble each other. All were highly centralized states denying any real prospect for left-wing goals of peace, justice, equality, and democratic self-government:

War and the preparation of war has become the normal mode of experience of great nations. . . . Nationalism is constantly becoming more virulent. . . . In this country and abroad, significant sections of the working class stood out

against World War I, but the British and American labor movements were almost solidly behind World War II. The power of the State has never been greater, the helplessness of the great mass of citizens never more extreme. . . . I do not know of a single party or movement . . . working to check this tendency in the only way I think it can be checked: through changing our present social structure in a libertarian socialist direction.<sup>17</sup>

Macdonald sharply distinguished “Radicals” prepared to face this new, grim condition of the present from an “old Left” he defined as “Progressive”—that is, anyone confident that the increase of scientific knowledge and economic production over time led toward human freedom and democracy. His “Radicals” comprised “as yet few individuals—mostly anarchists, conscientious objectors, and renegade Marxists like myself—who reject the concept of Progress, who judge things by their present meaning and effect, who think the ability of science to guide us in human affairs has been overrated and who therefore redress the balance by emphasizing the ethical aspect of politics.” His view was decidedly antihistoricist: “The whole idea of historical process, which a century ago was the badge of the Left, has become the most persuasive appeal of the apologists for the status quo”: namely, that whatever resulted from “history” was inescapable.<sup>18</sup> This great inversion in the meaning of “history” effectively wrecked the radical potency of Marxism, he thought, “because the system is built not on ethical principles but on the historical process itself.” Macdonald insisted on staking his claims on other grounds, arguing that a new approach to radical politics must tap the “ethical dynamic [which] comes from absolute and non-historical values, such as Truth and Justice, rather than from the course of history.”<sup>19</sup>

Macdonald titled his long essay “The Root Is Man,” for to be “radical” meant going to the root of things, and his antihistoricist solution lay in a foundational humanism, the centrality of a concept of “Man”:

Questions which formerly seemed to me either closed or meaningless are now beginning to appear open and significant. Such questions are those of Determinism v. Free Will, Materialism v. Idealism, the concept of Progress, the basis for making value judgments, the precise usefulness of science to human ends, and the nature of man himself. (In this I am not particularly original, of course: a similar shift of interest may be observed among most Western intellectuals, the most recent example being the vogue of existentialism.)<sup>20</sup>

Like Camus, Macdonald turned from History to the tentative efforts of individuals fashioning in their own time communities of mutual concern: “We must emphasize the emotions, the imagination, the moral feelings, the

primacy of the individual human being once more, must restore the balance that has been broken by the hypertrophy of science in the last two centuries. The root is man, here and not there, now and not then."<sup>21</sup> Here, in a radical left-wing vein, was the centering impulse characteristic of the entire period—a yearning for some anchor or foundation, a definition of things that lay at the heart of the matter.

With aims quite unlike Macdonald's, the Austro-British philosopher of science Karl Popper launched a long-reverberating salvo in his 1956 book, *The Poverty of Historicism*. Popper's critique was clearly part of the universalist-humanist recoil from totalitarianism, dedicating his book "to the memory of the countless men and women of all creeds or nations or races who fell victim to the fascist and communist belief in the Inexorable Laws of Historical Destiny." This formulation ascribed a single meaning to "historicism"—that is, the notion of "History" as providential force, whereas in the tradition of Vico, Croce, Auerbach, and others, "historicism" more modestly referred to historical contextualism and particularism—though Popper also assailed the kind of "relativism" he feared clung to those approaches as well. His specialty was philosophy of science, focusing mainly on method and modes of proof in the natural sciences. His basic argument in *Poverty* was a rejection of the notion of "historical laws" he identified with such ideologies as Marxism and Nazism; in contrast he insisted that "it is impossible for us to predict the future course of history."<sup>22</sup> Popper was determined to demonstrate that the discipline of history could not be a "science," which rightly consisted of those unique disciplines, he thought, that did have predictive capabilities based on "laws" proven to operate in experimental conditions.

Even there, Popper was cognizant of uncertainty, since he did not believe scientific propositions could ever *finally* be *verified*; rather, for him, the key to scientific explanation was to venture propositions that, logically, could be "*falsified*."<sup>23</sup> The only meaningful proof of a proposition's validity consisted of its withstanding experimental "falsification." If a statement did not entail a claim that, logically, could be demonstrated to be false, then it was not a *scientific* statement at all. Popper's idea of scientific procedure, geared to the principle of "falsificationism," demanded rational criticism and "learning from our errors": in fact, most reliable scientific statements were framed in the negative; that is, in terms of what *could not be done* given the laws of nature.

Popper allowed for a science of society and even a kind of "law" in social affairs—usually stated in the negative, as in the proposition that no complex society could exist without institutions of authority usually called "the state." He also accepted, and indeed advocated, the development of scientifically

guided “social engineering,” which could attempt “piecemeal” reforms. At the same time, he had no objection in principle to the ordinary practice of writing history, understood as an account of “unique events.” But for Popper *historicism* as such referred specifically to those theories that posited “laws of historical change” marking a succession of “periods” understood as distinctive social forms. His targets included the “stage theories” of nineteenth-century proponents of progress such as Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte, as well as the grand histories of “civilizations” by Arnold Toynbee or Spengler; but its principal object was Marxism, which he argued was *logically* complicit with the rise of Soviet totalitarianism.

Popper’s grandest work, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, published in 1945 in England, where Popper had sought refuge from Hitler’s conquest of Europe, had already ventured an extended critique of a historicist tradition “just as old or just as young as our civilization itself,” rooted in ancient Greek philosophy.<sup>24</sup> In his view, the current that ran from Platonic idealism to Hegel’s totalizing Spirit and Marx’s insistence of endowing all history with meaning, culminating in the achievement of communism, gave totalitarianism a kind of transhistorical warrant. Thus the deeply rooted Western phenomenon of historicism-cum-totalitarianism, which caged thought within an overweening worldview, posed a perennial danger that could only be held in check by the maintenance of the “open society,” Popper wrote, where humans could exercise critical reason—vigilant, he urged, against the return of premodern “tribalism” in the contemporary guise of “closed” totalitarian states.

### Standing Outside of Time

Popper belonged to the midcentury boom in the philosophy of science, which aimed to define the essence of “scientific method” in resistance to the politicized abuse of science under Hitler’s and Stalin’s regimes. As was typical of such centering moves, the designation of the principle believed to provide a foundation—here, the scientific method—did not mean that a clear consensus emerged regarding what defined that principle.

Most prominent in the new philosophy of science was the so-called Vienna Circle of philosophers, most of whom immigrated to the United States where they spread the doctrines of “logical empiricism” they had begun developing in the 1920s. One of the circle’s leaders, Rudolf Carnap, arrived at the University of Chicago and later taught at Harvard and Berkeley, always arguing for the primacy of science as the only way to know the world. Science for him was necessarily empirical, based on sensory observation of the

outer world, while also resting on a “formal logic,” which provided linguistic measures of syntax and semantics to distinguish those statements that made meaningful claims about the world from those metaphysical or evaluative statements that did no such thing. Other Viennese émigrés such as Otto Neurath differed in some ways with Carnap, but the most significant revision of logical empiricism came from the Harvard philosopher Willard V. O. Quine in the 1950s. Quine presented a more holistic view of scientific practice than the émigrés’ stringent inductive approach, arguing instead that rigorous scientific research relied on “conceptual schemes” that made observations meaningful. Such schemes constituted whole systems that could not simply be broken down, as strict logical empiricists suggested, into sense data on the one hand and synthetic ideas obeying logical forms on the other.<sup>25</sup> Quine’s sometime collaborator Nelson Goodman made other qualifications in the empiricist program: science and its achievements, he argued, inevitably rely on rules regarding what counts as a warranted inference about reality, rules codified into a working system and based on linguistic practices that have hitherto proven reliable but may yet be revised in experience.

However qualified, midcentury philosophy of science represented a new formalism, an inclination to define science as such according to certain essential properties and practices, which could be understood by taking distance from history—that is, from historical change and from the particularity of time and place. Of course, the logical empiricists knew that change was real, and that it mattered: they understood the history of science as one of progress, viewing change in science as the cumulation of knowledge. Yet closely aligned to the notion of cumulation was a strict notion of “internalism,” that scientific knowledge, rooted in the formalism of scientific method and the objectivity of controlled experiment, followed its own course aside from macro-historical trends and “external” pressures. Popper’s view—known as critical rationalism—differed from Carnap’s by putting at the center of scientific procedure the use of tests that could “falsify” faulty propositions, but it likewise assumed a formal, ahistorical purity in its operations. According to Popper’s liberal philosophy, social and historical biases or prejudices were no match for rational criticism; they could always be defeated by rigorous intellectual exchange that took the form of error disclosure. For all these philosophers and historians of science, science was science insofar as it stemmed from some Archimedian point of judgment shielded from the shifting winds of historicized points of view. They thereby rejected in principle a perspectival approach, which would recognize the role played by point of view in conditioning the appearance of reality; theirs was in effect what the philosopher Thomas Nagel, much later, calls “the view from nowhere.”<sup>26</sup>

This distancing from history assumed many forms, including in theological discussions seemingly far removed from the philosophy of science. To be sure, the combination of existentialist and neo-orthodox themes in Protestant theology, as practiced by the best known American religious thinker Reinhold Niebuhr or by the émigré Paul Tillich, recognized the historical realm of human experience and the demands it placed on individuals who strove to act righteously. And Christianity possessed its own historical consciousness, with reference to the temporal story of Jesus's ministry, his crucifixion and resurrection, and an expected second coming and final judgment; such millennialist expectations provided one important root of modern European and American ideas of progress. But in his major works of the 1940s—most fully in his theological treatise *The Nature and Destiny of Man*—Niebuhr insisted that the spiritual goal of salvation or the fulfillment of prophecy not be confused with historical process. For one thing, he assailed “the error of regarding the transcendent norm as a simple possibility” to be realized in human time—for the sinful but striving nature of “man” could never issue in morally perfect achievements. Those political doctrines that promised such ends were “secular religions,” whose misplaced absolutism fostered tyranny and atrocity. Thus Niebuhr's neo-orthodoxy came very close to Camus's call for an end of ideologies (notwithstanding Camus's atheism). “Man's story is not a success story,” *Time* magazine summed up Niebuhr's view when he made the news magazine's cover. Fully understood, Niebuhr's perspective inclined to irresolvable contradictions: humans existed in time, bound by transcendent moral law to act righteously in the face of history's actual dilemmas, but they must remain humbly aware that historical action at its best would always be faulty, tainted by human failings. Quoting the neo-orthodox theologian Emil Brunner, Niebuhr thought of humans “standing beyond the contradiction [of existence in time] and yet standing in it.” Here was the acute irony that contributed to Niebuhr's wide appeal among religious and secular American intellectuals through midcentury. Yet insofar as the human experience of time was inevitably off-balance, conditioned by historical contingencies, it was religion that would provide a center to life.<sup>27</sup>

Surely that centering impulse was expressed in the title of Paul Tillich's most successful book, *The Courage to Be* (1952). The “existence of man as man, his finitude, and his estrangement” was something given, beyond historical relativity, and the only meaningful salve, or way to “Be,” lay in something outside of time, the faithful acceptance of God's grace. In his *Dynamics of Faith* (1957), Tillich went on to define true religious experience as a matter of commitment to “ultimate concern”—that is, “concern about the truly ultimate”: a recognition of ends beyond all others in earthly life, of

a force that lies behind all of experience, and thus responsive only to what is transcendent. "Faith as ultimate concern is an act of the total personality. It is the most centered act of the human mind."<sup>28</sup>

Across the board, religious institutions enjoyed a renewal in the postwar years. A building boom of new churches and synagogues swept the country, sparked by the return of economic prosperity in the war years and the beginnings of mass suburbanization. The movement out of cities to suburbs springing up in large developments of tract housing (symbolized by the Levittowns outside of New York City and Philadelphia) gained momentum in part from mortgage benefits to veterans and highway construction—a migration overwhelmingly white in composition due to persistent housing segregation and the difficulties black veterans faced in obtaining GI Bill mortgage benefits. The transplanted families hungered for association, whether in Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) or religious congregations. Among Protestants in the "mainline" or ecumenical denominations (rather than those linked to the National Association of Evangelicals, founded in 1942), the spirit of Niebuhr and Tillich informed new attention to pastoral care: ministers, primed to address modern alienation and the everyday quandaries of their congregants, spoke in existentialist terms about the soul's search for meaning and authentic identity. That clerical mode was brilliantly depicted in John Updike's 1960 novel, *Rabbit, Run*. There the young, intellectual Episcopal priest, Jack Eccles, struggles to minister to the protagonist Harry (Rabbit) Angstrom. Eccles desperately seeks to draw Rabbit back to the wife he deserted and perhaps, at the same time, to the possibility of Grace—though Eccles, dogged in his mission, remains uncertain of his own faith and finds that his advice to Rabbit repeatedly misfires, with unanticipated, dreadful consequences. Far less uncertain in defining the center of devotion were the evangelical "crusades," starting in 1947, that brought the Southern Baptist minister Billy Graham, affirming biblical inerrancy, to the attention of audiences greater than any preacher had previously enjoyed.

The Jewish experience in the new suburbs was largely one of second-generation Americans still fairly close to the immigrant experience. Their movement out of the cities signaled both a self-conscious move into the mainstream of American life and often a move away from orthodox to Reform or Conservative synagogues. The names of new congregations, such as the Suburban Temple or the Massapequa Jewish Center, both on Long Island, New York, reflected a mainstream Americanism as they avoided Hebrew and strove to appear like anything but the old-fashioned *shul*. Writing in *Commentary* in 1949, the critic Paul Goodman and his architect brother Percival Goodman estimated that 1,800 new synagogues were in the planning stage.



They remarked on what they considered a meager Jewish tradition in “the plastic arts,” and though neither of the brothers was devout, Percival would embark on a distinguished career bringing modernist design into sync with Jewish heritage. The Goodmans argued for a traditional placement of the *bimah*, or reader’s desk, in the center of the congregation, not at the head of the hall; called for open designs with lots of light; and welcomed the idea of the synagogue as community center. They strove to identify in Jewish liturgical practice those elements consistent with their own artistic modernism and democratic communitarianism. And though they conceded those principles would likely not be shared by the new suburban congregations, Percival would design more than fifty synagogues in the coming decades.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the waning of overt antisemitism since the end of the war, these Jewish communities remained conscious of a long history of prejudice and exclusion. While they celebrated signs of acceptance in American life and generally took pride in the founding of the State of Israel (in contrast to earlier generations, when a significant number of Jews opposed Zionism for a variety of theological, cultural, or political reasons), the recent shock of Nazi genocide reverberated through these years. The story of Anne Frank, the German-Jewish girl who lived in hiding in Amsterdam during the war before her family was discovered and deported to the death camps (only her father surviving) became well-known after the publication of *The Diary of a Young Girl*, translated into English in 1952, followed by a Pulitzer Prize-winning play and a successful 1959 movie.

From Europe there also came the early “camp literature,” memoirs and reflections written by survivors in an existentialist mode. Little in modern experience more bitterly reflected the terror of meaninglessness than the death-in-life of the extermination camps. The Italian-Jewish writer Primo Levi wrote a brutal, harrowing account of “survival in Auschwitz”—the title given to the 1961 translation of his book, which was called *If This Is a Man* in the original 1947 Italian edition. Subtitled *The Nazi Assault on Humanity*, the book dwelled on a struggle to survive that reduced life itself to the barest essentials and endangered the moral core of the person. The Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl published his existentialist reflections on Auschwitz, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, in English translation in 1959. Originally titled in German “Nonetheless Saying ‘Yes’ to Life,” Frankl’s definition of existentialist therapy (or “logotherapy”) concerned the extremes of “depersonalization” and the redeeming qualities of love retrieved in memory even at the worst moments.

Such quests after timeless realities took other religious guises as well. In some ways, “Eastern religions”—which had a significant influence in

American life during the 1940s and 1950s well before observers discovered something called the “counterculture” or “the new age”—stepped further out of history than Christian neo-orthodoxy did. There is no linear, temporalized, messianic aspect, for instance, to Zen Buddhism as explained to Americans by the visiting Japanese scholar D. T. Suzuki. Eighty-one years old when he toured American universities in 1951, Suzuki lectured at Columbia University from 1952 to 1957, winning an enormous audience in the United States—including avant-garde composer John Cage and the Beat writers Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder—for his rendition of “the essence” of Zen. He approached Zen in philosophical fashion, seeking to elucidate its core ideas rather than dwelling as other Zen apostles did on meditational practices or the rigors of monastic training. Suzuki’s insistent reliance on enigma denied that sensory observation and the use of reason were capable of grasping Zen lessons. “Zen, not being logical and rational yet being common-sense and everyday-minded,” he wrote in a characteristic phrase, forever confounded opposites. Thus, on the one hand, time is indeed of the essence, since humans are, as the Buddhist novelist Ruth Ozeki put it years later, “time beings”: their presence in time, and their passing in death, defines their condition of suffering, which can only be salved by universal compassion. Beyond that lay the promise of “enlightenment,” or release from the vicissitudes of time; that is, an ultimate freedom from those cycles of death and rebirth that governed time-based existence. Ozeki’s phrase, of course, was intended ironically, for the given, physical life of human individuals had meaning only “for the time being.”<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, Suzuki’s Zen relativized *historical time* altogether, freely identifying past and future in a realm of enlightenment wholly removed from temporal sequence. Thus contrary propositions that the Buddha achieved his enlightenment in the course of his lifetime and that the Buddha had been enlightened before his own birth, in eternity, are for Suzuki’s Zen equally true. Compassion for the “time being,” for real humans, coexisted with the injunction to transcend passing time—an achievement of enlightenment that Suzuki called “grasping the Unattainable.”

Suzuki presented Zen to his American devotees in terms that resonated with the widespread desire to “find oneself,” which implied founding one’s existence on some solid basis that was “true” and resistant to conformist and fluctuating pressures. Suzuki knew the human quest to “sink into our own centre.” Yet this goal, he wrote, required becoming conscious of “a circle with no circumference, and therefore with its centre everywhere . . . [a] kind of circle having an infinite number of centres.” “Wherever you are you find yourself,” he wrote in the early 1960s. The characteristic enigma of being

placed and yet placeless Suzuki explained with this enigmatic play on the idea of a “centered” experience with no circumference.<sup>31</sup>

The connection between Suzuki’s spirit and the common inclination to take one’s distance from history achieved iconic expression in a symbolic act by poet Louis Simpson, one of many World War II veterans returning to an interrupted education. Having seen brutal combat in Europe and studying at Columbia in the late 1940s, Simpson one day cast his wristwatch out the window of a tall building, “because,” he said, “we are all living in Eternity now.” He was one of those, “the best minds of my generation,” driven mad in postwar America, who Allen Ginsberg memorialized in his 1955 poem *Howl*—like those “who threw watches off the roof to cast their ballot / for / Eternity outside of Time.”<sup>32</sup>

Even when determinedly secular thinkers wrote about historical affairs, history often lost primacy to other, ontological concerns. Following her portrait of “the origins of totalitarianism,” Arendt published a more strictly philosophical work, *The Human Condition* (1958), which suggested by its very title something that could be defined as a permanent or universal phenomenon. Again, she could hardly avoid historical references, first to ancient Greece, the source of her political-philosophical principles, and then to the rise of the “modern” world with its distinctive standards—particularly what she called “the rise of the social,” the new primacy granted to the material conditions of human welfare and everyday affairs of work and subsistence. Yet any conventional notion of history, of causation in context, of events embedded in present and precedent conditions, had little place in her discussion.

The human condition was something Arendt defined in terms borrowed from the Ancients: the essence of human rationality lay in the public exercise of political judgment by free citizens of a self-governing *polis*, whose concerns could not be focused on mere conditions of physical life. Those belonged properly to the private world of the household, though the modern world had exaggerated their significance in the pseudo-public notion of “the social.” Action as such Arendt understood to be free by definition, a choice to “bring something new into the world,” driven by an intention that could not be understood as derived from preexisting conditions. Genuine human “action,” in Arendt’s sense, affected something in the construction of the human world that had not existed before. In this respect, she celebrated “worldliness,” which ostensibly carried with it a bracing sense of realism and a challenging vision of citizen participation as the very meaning of democratic community. Yet *Human Condition* rendered concrete history in any customary sense almost beside the point.

French Existentialism also held a deep ambivalence about history. In a world rendered “absurd” by the loss of faith in transcendent meanings, it was up to real human individuals to make their own history. As Camus put it, humans were “up to their necks” in history. Yet any determinist notion of history conditioning human action struck existentialists as “bad faith.” Thus, de Beauvoir explicated “existentialist ethics” in the introduction to the 1953 English edition of her landmark book on the status of women, *The Second Sex*, this way:

Every subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence [or self-overcoming]: he achieves liberty only through a continued reaching out toward other liberties. There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the . . . brutish life of subjection to given conditions—and of liberty into constraint and contingency.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the doctrine “existence precedes essence,” and its companion appeal to action and freedom, de Beauvoir relied on a diction that sounded essentialist. Her subject was “woman,” not *women*—although she insisted, “When I use the words *woman* or *feminine* I evidently refer to no archetype, no changeless essence whatever.” Still, her analysis typically generalized, always phrased in the present tense. Archetypes rang through the entire book.

De Beauvoir argued that the subordination of woman rested on their being denied precisely the active role “existentialist ethics” prescribed. Men, she wrote,

propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego . . . The drama of woman lies in this conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego)—who always regards the self as the essential—and the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential.<sup>34</sup>

Despite a section labeled “History” making up about a tenth of her text, de Beauvoir wrote in a phenomenological vein of generic persons—the infant, the child, the girl, the woman in love—who endure various stereotypical situations. De Beauvoir’s reader—forewarned to “understand the phrase ‘in the present state of education and custom’ after most of my statements”—would nonetheless frequently encounter literary allusions, quite outside the present, as commentary on woman’s lot. Immediately following the section on “History” (more a survey in evolutionist anthropology), de Beauvoir devoted

a longer portion of the book to “Myths”—intended in one sense to review long-enduring falsehoods about women’s nature but mainly concerned with mythology through the ages, from the Egyptian Isis to the Christian Virgin, from *Arabian Nights* to European fairy tales.

*The Second Sex* was reviewed on page 3 of the *New York Times Book Review* by the Harvard anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn, who discussed this “truly magnificent book” under the universalist title “The Female of Our Species.” Yet if that title suggested something timeless, de Beauvoir also believed that in *her* time, the liberation of women was dawning, especially in the United States, where she had apparently met a number of young women willing to cast age-old “womanhood” aside. In his review, Kluckhohn rightly checked her enthusiasm, for while a slow rise in women’s employment, occupational achievement, and expectations of equality continued through the 1950s in the United States, that trend almost stalled under the reinvigorated domesticity of the time. Aside from his barbed comments about the Marxist elements in de Beauvoir’s analysis, Kluckhohn was not at all scandalized by her radicalism. He considered her critique fresh and compelling, though on the issue of biological difference and gender identity he found a surer guide in Margaret Mead’s *Male and Female*, which had famously qualified Mead’s earlier cultural pluralism.

As in de Beauvoir’s appeal to Isis, the salience of “myth” in human experience also drew attention as part of the antihistoricist streak in midcentury thought and culture, particularly among those who had established psychoanalysis as a major presence in the United States. Freud had intended to create a science of psyche valid for all human experience, which was on the one hand bound to procreation and family formation and to biologically given “drives” or “instincts.” Critics, beginning with anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski in the 1920s, had challenged Freud’s universalism for decades already, and now neo-Freudian “revisionists,” who flourished in the United States, argued for the sociocultural relativity of psychic dynamics and maladies. Freud himself frequently related mind to myth, starting with his early reliance on Sophocles’s *Oedipus* to define one of the most central quandaries in human development and continuing with his later, quasi-anthropological works, *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939).

Freud’s rival, Carl Jung of Switzerland, took depth psychology decisively into the realm of myth with his theory of a “collective unconscious,” a well of archetypal stories and images, linked to ancient folklore and mysticism throughout time and across cultures, that granted humanity its common heritage. Orthodox Freudians had always considered Jung a fantasist, yet “Jungian analysis” gained adherents through the 1950s in the United States

and found its way into a variety of intellectual pursuits. The mythic, mystical, and spiritual also surged in American thought and culture through the work of scholars such as Joseph Campbell, a professor of comparative religion influenced by Freud, Jung, and various Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist traditions, whose multivolume survey of world mythology, *The Masks of God*, began appearing in 1959. Similarly, a founder of “religious studies,” the Hungarian émigré Mircea Eliade at the University of Chicago, dwelled on myth and mysticism. From Jung to Eliade, all these trends suggested a hankering after some notion of worldwide human harmony, combined with a turn away from scientific reason to the frank embrace of the “irrational” in human life. These dispositions were vastly different from Popper’s antihistoricism, which rested on the supremacy of critical reason, and even from Macdonald’s radical humanism, which while critical of science as technological euphoria was stoutly secular. The mythic turn only showed how varied the manifestations could be of the recoil from historicism toward the timeless elements of human experience.

### The New Conservatism

Another strain of antihistoricism, coming from the other side of the political spectrum from Macdonald’s radical humanism, resided in conservative political philosophy, which revived in the late 1940s at the hands of both American authors and émigré scholars destined to wield wide influence in the American academy. The German-Jewish philosopher Leo Strauss came to the United States in 1937, first joining the New School for Social Research in New York City and then in the late 1940s beginning a long tenure at the University of Chicago. Through the 1950s he nurtured a following there among American students who achieved much greater prominence in the 1970s and after, particularly as interpreters of US constitutionalism. Like Arendt, Strauss took ancient Greek political philosophy as a point of departure for his inquiry. He was contemptuous of much modern philosophy and social theory yet was profoundly devoted to the constitutional Founders of the United States—who for Strauss as for Arendt, seemed to stand outside time as genius creators of something utterly unique. Strauss nonetheless cut a different path from Arendt, leaning to the right. He promoted the conservative view that only standards jealously protective of rationality, virtue, and restraint—marks of what Strauss’s student Allan Bloom would call “the permanent concerns of mankind”—could hold back the popular passions that had brought totalitarian demagoguery to such disastrous heights. Strauss considered historicism and relativism the twin evils of triumphant

modernity. Another conservative émigré, Eric Voegelin, delivered his own theory of modern declension in his 1951 lectures at Chicago, which was quickly emerging as an intellectual foil to the pragmatist and progressive traditions that had previously held sway at Columbia and other East Coast institutions. The revulsion at “totalitarianism” that motivated Strauss drove Voegelin to indict “gnostic” traditions, manifest he said in fascist and communist ideologies that claimed unique access to a hidden truth that foretold a future paradise wrought by human (not divine) hands. In contrast, Arendt’s ambivalent leaning toward the left tempered her Greek-based suspicion of modernity and led her to reject Strauss and Voegelin’s dark theories of civilizational decline.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, the “new conservatism” that arose among American political commentators in the 1950s expressed the antihistoricist temper in more popular venues. In the 1955 opening mission statement of his new magazine, *National Review*, the young William F. Buckley Jr. wrote, “A conservative is someone who stands athwart history, yelling Stop, at a time when no one is inclined to do so, or to have much patience with those who so urge it.”<sup>36</sup>

Actually, conservative thinkers had long had an ambivalent view of history. For the original theorists of modern conservatism in the wake of the French Revolution, notably Edmund Burke, the inheritance of the past—the *weight of history*—was a counter to the Jacobin desire to remake the world from square one (as in the literal resetting of the calendar, marking January 1792 as the commencement of Year 1 of the Revolutionary Republic). Buckley’s antihistoricism arose, by contrast, from his abhorrence of the modern welfare state, in his view the creation of reformers who imagined they could predict the future and guide its course through “social engineering.” Whether conservative thinkers were inclined to embrace history or cry out against it, their principles were geared toward valuing that which endured rather than embracing changefulness and flux as virtues. That disposition received a surprisingly receptive response from many liberals, including the literary critic Lionel Trilling and historian Richard Hofstadter. In the introduction to his 1950 collection *The Liberal Imagination*, Trilling had disparaged most conservative thought as “irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas,” yet he and Hofstadter voiced appreciation for a “conservative” temperament they thought provided for the stability of “values” in contrast to the “ideological” enthusiasms of the progressive left.

Two other writers a half-generation older than Buckley in the new conservative orbit, Russell Kirk and Peter Viereck, gained wide recognition as they advanced arguments in favor of the retention of historic customs, morals, and standards of authority as necessary to maintaining social stability and keep-

ing the threat of totalitarianism at bay. Kirk, a proud Michigander devoted to limited government, found a valuable US conservatism in the states' rights and agrarian-localist politics thinkers of the old South. He took pains to distinguish "conservative" from extreme "reactionary" thought, however, quoting the literary critic Paul Elmer More, who called upon "the imagination as a force for order and self-restraint and political health."<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, Viereck, a prize-winning poet who bore the cross of having a father who was imprisoned during World War II as a pro-Nazi propagandist, sought to steer conservatism away from reaction, titling his first book on politics *Conservatism Revisited: The Revolt Against Revolt* (1949). Viereck dedicated the book to his brother's example rather than his father's—"Corporal George S. Viereck, Jr., killed by Nazis as an American volunteer in the never-ending war for freedom." Again, the threat of totalitarianism—considered a species of "revolt"—occasioned Viereck's manifesto. Ironically, he sought to vindicate the thought of the Hapsburg statesman Klemens Metternich, widely considered the architect of mid-nineteenth-century European counterrevolution. Metternich understood conservatism rightly as "a social and cultural cement, holding together what western man has built and by that very fact providing a base for orderly change and improvement," founded on "a humanist reverence for the dignity of the individual soul."<sup>38</sup> Such was a conservatism, affirming "change and improvement" for the sake of individual freedom, that modern liberals could appreciate. Historian Eric Goldman quipped that Viereck was "an off-beat liberal who enjoys calling himself a conservative."<sup>39</sup>

The rhetorician Richard M. Weaver was far more hostile to contemporary liberalism. Liberals would recognize Weaver, another Chicago faculty member, as an accomplished classicist; and some could sympathize with his indictment of modern brutality evident in the atrocities committed on all sides during World War II. But Weaver made no concessions to a modern spirit of individualism and orderly change; his 1948 cri de coeur, *Ideas Have Consequences*, offered a relentless denunciation of modern life, which he understood as nothing less than "the dissolution of the West," resulting in a condition he dubbed "abysmality": "Modern man," as he argued, "is in the deep and dark abyss, and he has nothing with which to raise himself."<sup>40</sup> No one could accuse Weaver of providing rationalizations for contemporary privilege. His critique was far too broad based for that; he indicted the whole course of "Western" development since the fourteenth century, when, in his view, the rise of "nominalism"—or skepticism that general concepts and words accurately represented real things—broke from the founding principles of classical philosophy and medieval Christianity that ideas *are* real,



indeed the only true reality. Denying the existence of transcendental ideals, all modern philosophy hastened “modern man’s descent into chaos.”<sup>41</sup>

Weaver had started out among the Southern Agrarians of Vanderbilt, and unlike others in the circle he never broke from that perspective. The Agrarians had found a meaningful order in the old South plantation society, a society founded on the principle of organic hierarchy and averse to the modern dogma of “emancipation” or freedom founded in equality of status. The clear countermodern and counterliberal principles of this current lingered in a minor social philosophy known as distributism, which had supporters in the United States during the 1930s as well as among right-wing traditionalists (some with fascist sympathies) in Europe. Opposed to both communism and “monopoly capitalism,” distributists believed in the centrality of private property as the nurturing milieu of family, family-based authority, and the “sanctification of work,” in a sense that was closely associated with Catholic social doctrine.

This was Weaver’s grounding. “The moral solution [to modern alienation and the degradation of “mass life”] is the distributive ownership of small properties,” he wrote, even though the example of the old South’s plantations—hardly “small” farms—was never far from Weaver’s image of organic community. Always backward looking, he longed for a bygone time when such values had taken hold in North America: “Whether it was New England ships or Pennsylvania iron or Virginia tobacco, the name of an individual usually stood behind what was offered publicly as a tacit assumption of responsibility.” That order had given way to the “robbery through adulteration” that characterized the contemporary capitalist marketplace. Weaver scorned modern “urban life” and praised the principle of divine right—that is, the idea of leaders who are “guided by the right” given by “the ordinance of God,” as opposed to those who courted the fancy of democratic voters. In a world of leveling, concentrated property, degraded work, and degenerate arts, moderns could express only egoism, appetite, and a “spoiled-child psychology.” Twentieth-century Americans, Weaver held, rejected discipline and the very idea of heroism.<sup>42</sup>

Weaver was a thorough-going conservative whose disgust at modern life—particularly the rise of brutality in war and standardization of popular culture—verged on similar complaints offered by left-wing critics like Macdonald and Mumford. Behind his censure of modern war, however, was not peace but Weaver’s recollection of “heroism,” allegedly forgotten martial virtues; underlying his critique of popular entertainment was doubt that mass literacy, or even “the invention of writing,” represented an advance in human history. Everything for Weaver fell into the whole, monolithic

evil of modernity, not infrequently voiced in simple prejudices. He surmised that Impressionist painters expressed a “socialist” vision, since “if a picture is only the result of exposure to light waves, one tree or field or seascape will be the same for all.” Such an aesthetic, he claimed, upheld no “convention” of beauty and hence no “transcendence” of sensory experience whatsoever.

Weaver’s “transcendence” was not the existentialists’ pursuit of self-overcoming but rather the persistence of ideal forms. “If form does not exist prior to things,” he wrote with the Impressionists in mind, “naturally it is realism to paint [mere] things.” The driving force behind contemporary art was “a psychic urge to collapse all order,” manifested in jazz, he wrote with ill-disguised racism, “a music of primitivism,” a “triumph of grotesque, even hysterical, emotion over propriety and reasonableness.”<sup>43</sup> Not for nothing did C. L. R. James’s *American Civilization* dwell on Weaver’s *Ideas Have Consequences*, dubbing it “as serious a counter-revolutionary manifesto as I have seen in the United States.”

Conservative intellectual life was, in any case, as diverse as the broad span of “liberalism.” Whittaker Chambers, the ex-Communist accuser of Alger Hiss, believed that a return to faith in the Christian God was needed to resist the demonic communist enemy: the choice at midcentury was between God and Stalin. On the other hand, the libertarian Ayn Rand avowed atheism, though she too sought the moral stability that so many liberals and conservatives desired—despite the constant churn that the unregulated market she advocated usually entailed. She believed that Aristotle’s virtue ethics offered absolutes consistent with her claim to uphold a completely rational and logical worldview. The result for Rand was a stilted doctrine she called Objectivism that would establish moral and epistemological fixity in a world she imagined as a utopia of properly “selfish” individuals. That antihistoricist impulse also characterized the “neoliberal” economist Friedrich von Hayek, founder of the laissez-faire Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) in postwar Switzerland who hoped to fashion “a coherent social philosophy . . . a holistic worldview,” which would provide the “agreement on fundamentals” necessary to a market society.<sup>44</sup> Hayek’s market economics failed to pass muster with Rand’s thorough-going libertarianism. Meanwhile, Buckley’s *National Review* bitterly assailed Rand’s “godless” philosophy.

Despite the wide range of antihistoricist arguments at midcentury, of course, the historical enterprise did not lack for proponents. Some writers traveled in a direction opposite to that we have seen so far, moving from ahistorical principles to decidedly historical ways of thinking in the aftermath of the war. The best example may be the writer and cultural theorist Kenneth Burke, an avant-garde Greenwich Village bohemian in the 1920s,

who started out seeking grounds for “the absolute” in human experience and artistic expression. A devotee of art for art’s sake, Burke initially held to aesthetic standards of excellence unpolluted by the momentary passions of a time and the desires of particular audiences. Even in the mid-1930s, when he entered the orbit of the Communist-led League of American Writers, Burke still yearned for enduring standards, to be justified, he wrote, by “the fact that man’s neurological structure has remained pretty much of a constant through all the shifts of his environment [and] would justify us in looking for permanence beneath the differences.”<sup>45</sup> Yet he was moving toward the historical, no doubt under the social and political imperatives of a time of crisis, but in ways that would not *reduce* art to politics. That was the great complaint aimed against “the Thirties” and the partisan notions of culture that, in effect, asked of artists, “Which Side Are You On?” By the 1950s he had reached a position insisting on the historical character of art. His mature work rested on the notion that art, no less than other discourses (political, ethical, scientific, even courtship) was a form of rhetoric or persuasion. Art for Burke was a symbolic act, mobilizing the rhetorical forms available for expression in a complex, historically specific situation.

The post-1930s flight from political commitment to formalism by artists and critics appalled by Stalinism struck Burke as disingenuous. He had surrendered his own flirtation with “the absolute” or some “metabiological” basis of what was profoundly “human,” and saw no reason to return to those stakes. He developed his “dramatistic” sense of human creativity in order to emphasize the communicative character of art without making any demands for simplistic “messages.” Burke’s notion of rhetorical situations posed a challenging task of analysis and interpretation, requiring attention to the actor’s historical location and motives, the act of symbolic expression itself, the available forms available for that expression, and the dialogic relation between actor and audience. Burke’s method made the work of art profoundly social and historical, situating artists within their time but also potentially against it. Art was action striving by communication to respond to and change given circumstances and available modes of understanding.

Burke had a number of ardent followers, including sociologist C. Wright Mills and novelist Ralph Ellison. Mills invoked historical inquiry in protest against his discipline’s static view of social relations and the mood of the moment, which he thought lacked either the aspiration or energy to make change. In his 1959 book *The Sociological Imagination*, Mills argued for a method that “enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals.” He wanted a sociology that “enables us to grasp history and

biography and the relations between the two within society,” illuminating “the salient characteristic of [our] time—and the problem of how history is being made within it.”<sup>46</sup> His emphasis on uniting biography and history in the study of social situations virtually echoed Burke’s dramatic view of action.<sup>47</sup> Another sociologist quite different from Mills, Erving Goffman, also drew on Burke to develop a “dramaturgic” theory of social interaction. Yet as historian Robert Genter puts it, the historicity Burke advocated was “untimely”; these writers “appeared as gadflies in the 1950s”—for the tide of the time led in the other direction.<sup>48</sup> The wish to think *sub specie aeternitatis*, to jettison historicism for the eternal or at least the duration of “Man,” powerfully inflected the times—whether in terms of human biology, or of morality reinstated as categorical imperatives, in myth as a primordial force, in psychological or existentialist accounts of human essence, or often some combination of all these themes.

In all these ways, antihistoricist modes of thought surged back into American life, after a time, from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, when historical awareness of variability and particularity had been considered a bellwether of the modern imagination. Indeed, it is possible to historicize antihistoricism in this manner. Midcentury contemporaries did so themselves, arguing that *this was the time* when people must return to nontemporal ways of thinking and feeling, for the experience of present and still-living recent horrors made it a matter of moral responsibility to contemplate enduring things.

### Modernity Reloaded

And yet, this manifold of antihistoricist dispositions hardly told the whole story of this time. Many antihistoricists could never escape history or indeed avoid all *historicist* modes of thought. Tellingly, while Karl Popper denied meaning to “developmental” laws that charted the succession of “periods” in human society according to some grand trajectory, he nonetheless fell back upon a deep evolutionary scheme of Western thought: the idea that human origins lay in an “unchanging” primitive society that gave way to “civilization” and finally “modern” life. In Popper’s view, it was modern science and skeptical reason that prevented slippage back to the “tribal” world the totalitarians re-created. In fact, one of the most characteristic traits of the midcentury period is that, just as the great horrors of totalitarianism, war, and genocide shook confidence in the idea of modern “progress,” the postwar years also unleashed a new progressive spirit, pinned on the resumption of economic growth, the defeat of dictators, the establishment of the United

Nations as a world peace-keeping body, the inception of decolonization and antiracist campaigns, new technologies turned from military to civilian uses, and apparent improvement in standards of social welfare. In Western Europe, once economic reconstruction got underway and achieved rapid momentum by the middle 1950s, confidence grew in the beneficence of technology. Even as the Cold War and the nuclear arms race encouraged apocalyptic fears of another total war that could be *finally* devastating to humankind, the rivalry of the Soviet Union and the United States fueled dueling schemes for advancing the industrial, economic, and social development of poor societies. In other words, disenchantment with modernity quickly gave way to visions of social development that effectively retooled the rhetoric of progress under the name of “modernization.” Ironically, this antihistoricist time was also the time of reloading the promises of modernity.

A number of critics, no less devoted to democratic outcomes than the chastened liberals most wary of totalitarian mass movements, emerged to challenge the antihistoricist watchwords. *After Utopia* was the title of the book the young Harvard political theorist Judith Shklar published in 1957. If “Utopia” had become a kind of curse word identified with the crazed prophecies of totalitarian world changers, Shklar regretted the consequences of what came “after” its dismissal. The antiutopian mood of her time, she feared, threatened the Enlightenment aspiration to improve human life through social and political innovation and renovation. Like Arendt, Shklar gave pride of place to “politics,” but without Arendt’s antimodern streak. For Shklar, to be political meant to be a critic of given conditions and a reformer with ideal aims of enhancing human freedom, equality, and community. Echoing Tom Paine, she regarded the arch restraint on innovation imposed by Paine’s critic and enemy of the French Revolution, Edmund Burke, to be “anti-political,” all-too characteristic of a time when the retreat from ambitions for social change signaled another historic “failure of nerve.”<sup>49</sup>

Through the 1940s and 1950s a hardy corps of other pragmatists persisted in promoting modern, secular reformism as Shklar did. At the very opening of our period, philosopher Morton White recalled a “revolt against formalism” that had led John Dewey, Thorstein Veblen, and other critics in the early twentieth century to recognize the plasticity of human affairs—a view now threatened by a wave of retreat to matters of faith and unalterable truths. In 1956, philosopher Charles Frankel in *The Case for Modern Man* ventured his own critique of “historicism,” but not as retreat from change making. The historicism Frankel rejected was epitomized by Arnold Toynbee’s theory of the rise and fall of civilizations, “the idea that human societies (unless they are dying) are integrated wholes,” that “nothing happens at random or serves

no purpose; everything harmonizes with everything else and serves the unity of the whole.” In defending what he called “the liberal philosophy of history,” Frankel offered “a choice between a view of human destiny in which chance and accident play a part, but in which human beings are free to give history the direction they choose, and a view of human destiny from which chance and accident disappear.” Countering “the anxiety to believe,” Frankel urged instead an aspiration to act for change, to revive the capacity of citizens to “participate” in self-government, a message that Frankel’s student Arnold Kaufman would reframe under the name of “participatory democracy” in the early 1960s and make available to an emerging New Left.<sup>50</sup>

Between the (Edmund) Burkean mood and the persistent pragmatists stood the sociologist Daniel Bell, the preeminent exponent of the 1950s idea, “the end of ideology.” Writing in 1960, he may have been responding to Shklar when he wrote, “If ‘ideology’ by now, and with good reason, is an irretrievably fallen word, it is not necessary that ‘utopia’ suffer the same fate.”<sup>51</sup> He specified, however, that the admirable desire for a better future had, in his time, “to specify *where* one wants to go, *how* to get there, the costs of the enterprise, and some realization of, and justification for the determination of *who* is to pay.”<sup>52</sup> Bell surely shared Popper’s deep suspicion of “historicism,” the view that transhistorical schemes of development or a too-ready confidence in progress could excuse current abuses as necessary means to better ends. But in another sense, the “end of ideology” suggested precisely a reassertion of faith in progress, when identified with the liberal welfare state. The “end of ideology” idiom had achieved a distinctive connotation by the mid-1950s, when anticommunist liberals hailed a crucial achievement of maturity in the politics of “the West,” as old, polar definitions of Left and Right apparently bowed to a new realism and willingness to compromise. This was a political world in which the “free market” and the “planned economy” were no longer absolute standards or antitheses but rather elements to be “mixed” in a new kind of society where democratic control of economic affairs enhanced popular well-being while preserving civil liberties. In such an order, business autonomy and public principles (including ventures in social ownership) would be adapted to each other.

At least that was the conclusion of the Congress of Cultural Freedom (CCF) meeting in Milan, Italy, September 1955, in a new mood of triumph. The CCF’s rival, Hayek’s Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS), had imagined itself as an intellectual center for the postwar world committed to a revival of classical market-based liberalism. Yet Hayek’s warning that economic planning was inevitably the “road to serfdom” came under fire from welfare liberals who backed the British Labour Party or Harry Truman’s Fair Deal and

rejected Hayek's "social philosophy" as too "ideological." By the time of the 1955 Milan meeting, a number of figures who Hayek had tried to enroll in MPS, including Popper, had drifted away, and the CCF could declare victory for its social-democratic liberalism as the real center of postwar political life, having dispatched both the communist left and the laissez-faire right. Welfare state reforms of the postwar world appeared to people in the CCF milieu to be the sound order of things, a *settlement* reached in the course of an emerging modernity and a model for non-Western societies to emulate as an endpoint of development.

In its search for centers, this time offered its own critique of what a later generation called "metanarratives," at least in the shape of the "ideologies" of providential History. Yet in the desire to determine the bases of a nontotalitarian worldview, a group like the CCF also re-created its own metanarratives of modernizing reform, not without a measure of self-contradiction. The peculiar combination of the midcentury period—a suspicion of modern progressivism and a "reloading" of the modern metanarrative—constituted a fertile field for thought. Yet it was an ensemble of ideas, values, and dispositions that would, before long, also pass from the scene. For notwithstanding the antihistoricist hankering for attention to "the permanent concerns of mankind," an observer of the contemporary world could very well have echoed the phrase attributed to Galileo as he left the inquisition, "*Eppur si muove*": "Still, it moves!"

## CHAPTER FOUR



# The Decentered Search for the Centered Self

In James Baldwin's second novel, *Giovanni's Room* (1956), his narrator-protagonist David ponders why he suddenly lit out for Europe and tentatively concludes that he did so for the peculiarly American reason that he "wanted to find myself." The phrase, David insists, is not current "in the language of any other people" and "certainly does not mean what it says but betrays a nagging suspicion that something has been misplaced."<sup>1</sup> David's sojourn to the Old World does little to render his desires, inclinations, and capacities legible or stable. He remains unable to accept his homosexual longings, particularly for the titular character whom he abandons after Giovanni's conviction for murder, and is so alienated from himself that he is at the end startled by his reflection in the mirror and uncertain of "what moves in this body" and for "what this body is searching" (189).

Contemporaries criticized both the novel's unapologetic treatment of homosexuality and its failure to chronicle black life. Such charges of decadence and elitism haunted Baldwin's career and obscured his insight that whites demonized black people out of an inability—or refusal—to know themselves. David's failure, therefore, spoke to a wider cultural problem, and Baldwin was not the only observer who believed that Americans had few institutions to aid their search for self. Postwar commentators characteristically noted the presence of rootless, unfulfilled, and uncommunicative individuals, despite seeming unprecedented abundance and social peace.

For some the problem lay with the absence of meaningful communities and interpersonal relations brought on by modernity. Others blamed corporate



bureaucracy, advertising, and a wide array of institutional demands for conformity such as schools, the media, and the isolation of suburban family life.<sup>2</sup>

Postwar concern about the insubstantiality of selves quickly assumed a political cast. Arguing material and objective causes did not adequately explain popular support for fascist and communist regimes, analysts turned to psychosocial abnormalities. Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* (1941), Theodor Adorno's *Authoritarian Personality* (1950), philosopher Jacob Talmon's *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952), and Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958) all attributed totalitarian success to the ability of ruling groups to manipulate unfulfilled psychological needs. Although fascist and communist ideologies had little appeal to most Americans, many commentators nonetheless worried that a society of anomic individuals who lacked internalized standards were fodder for poseurs and demagogues. That possibility no doubt fanned an interest in Tocqueville's argument that democracy produced citizens who sought safety in a culture of stifling uniformity and who were capable of massing against those who were distinctive or different.<sup>3</sup> Augmenting the theoretical work of the social critics was the research of social psychologists Solomon Asch and Stanley Milgram, who concluded that most individuals lacked the psychological assuredness to resist a relentless majority or a demanding, unfeeling authority. Asch observed that subjects more often than not acceded to group opinion, even when it countered their own perceptions. For his part, Milgram discovered that most people would continue to punish others when authorities ordered them to do so. There was, many observers concluded, a "Good German" in all of us.<sup>4</sup>

In meeting the growing weight of expectations placed on the self, Americans increasingly looked to psychological discourse or therapy rather than religion or philosophy. Where once Americans examined the state of their souls, their postwar counterparts increasingly turned their attention to their mental and emotional makeup. Emblematic of the shift was Rabbi Joshua Liebman's best-selling *Peace of Mind* (1947), which blended Talmudic wisdom with Freudian insight, and the rapid rise of pastoral counseling within all faith communities.<sup>5</sup> Noteworthy, too, was the growth in the psychological profession. Five times as many doctorates in psychology were awarded in the 1950s as the decade before. The number of psychiatrists increased tenfold from 1939 to 1959.<sup>6</sup> With numbers came a new prestige. Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) and Robert Lindner's *Fifty-Minute Hour* (1955) were indicative of the midcentury tendency to extol the psychiatrist as seer and depth psychology as the royal road to understanding motivation. Although Freud attracted the most acclaim, his rival Carl Jung was extraordinarily influential,

especially in the growing field of personality testing. Two instruments—the Thematic Apperception Test and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator—were deeply indebted to Jung’s *Psychological Types* (1923).<sup>7</sup> Small wonder, then, that *Life* magazine hailed the 1950s as the “Age of Psychology.”<sup>8</sup>

Postwar American efforts to find themselves proceeded along a number of distinct but related paths. A significant tendency held that stable selfhood depended upon understanding and accepting the dictates of the body. While an influential minority insisted that body determined self, most investigators turned their attention to the balance between biological endowments and social demands. Others wondered if society pressed too much or too little on individuals—a question that emerged in the cultural prominence of the problem of loneliness. Few groups’ quest for self received as much scrutiny as that of teenagers. An emerging market, adolescents attracted intense concern over whether their evolving customs would allow them to become adults capable of meeting the challenges of the Cold War.

### Body and Self

The notion that biology determined selfhood enjoyed great respect during much of the first half of the twentieth century. Many scientists and critics believed that such traits as alcoholism, intelligence, and insanity had somatic causes and used bodily defects as justification for psychiatric hospitals’ programs of sterilization. Although Nazi genocide discredited the approach, especially when it took the form of race thinking, biological explanations for self and identity continued to circulate in American cultural and intellectual life after the war. Pointing to human physicality provided a center for the self. In addition, as Nadine Weidman has observed, anchoring the self in a biological foundation countered Soviet claims to be building the new human.<sup>9</sup>

No one was as insistent that the self was a function of body as psychologist William Sheldon (1898–1977). The godson of William James, Sheldon drew upon post-Mendelian modern genetics with its emphasis on multiple determinants of traits to lay out an elaborate form of somatic classification. His scheme rated both male and female physiques along seven-point scales on the basis of their sphericity, muscularity, and linearity. He could then assign each body a three-digit number. Sheldon maintained that somatotypes remained fixed, even with weight change. He took a similar approach with personality, which he ranked according to sixty traits he claimed originated in bodily need, and which fell into clusters around relaxation, muscular activity involving action and power, and restraint and inhibition. People with prominent guts (endomorphs) craved relaxation and pampering—both somatic and

psychological. Muscle-bound men (mesomorphs) were driven toward action and power and took little note of others, and so on. Although Sheldon conceded that traits could appear in different forms, and that there were numerous cases in which morphologies did not match with manifest temperaments, he never doubted physique was destiny.

Not surprisingly, somatotypers were prone to snap judgments. Physical anthropologist Carl Seltzer breezily contended that weak (effeminate by his estimation) body types (about 15 percent of the white male population) were likely to lack psychic energy, proper motivation, sociability, and appropriate values. Sheldon applauded the 1-7-2 body (which had the highest muscularity and little sphericity or linearity) as the “incarnation of a heroic ideal,” the “masculine ideal of warlike and conquering people,” the “American eagle of somatotypes,” and claimed that the type was most often found in those who traced their heritage to Anglo-Saxon countries. His animal analogies for other categories were less complimentary.<sup>10</sup>

Sheldon’s overt racism, support for eugenics, and ornery personality initially proved no obstacle to widespread acceptance of his “science.” Tapping the desire for grounded and knowable self, Sheldon’s contention that the self was a consequence of its bodily form gave lay people and professionals alike a way to comprehend and classify the seeming diversity of human behavior and inclinations. Magazines ran such articles as “What Manner of Morph Are You?” and “How Your Shape Shapes Your Life.” Psychologists subjected numerous Ivy League freshmen to nude photography sessions and psychological examination upon their arrival on campus. But by the mid-1950s, Sheldonism was under critical scrutiny. Detractors charged he mixed causation with correlation, ignored changes in body type, offered “just so” stories as explanations, and had failed to produce convincing results despite years of measuring. His research assistant simply confirmed what critics suspected when she claimed he fudged his classifications so that body and personality type meshed.<sup>11</sup>

Alfred Kinsey’s approach to the body-self relation has proven more politically and intellectually credible than Sheldon’s. A biologist who claimed to have no vested interest in the outcome, he undertook his famous reports on human sexual behavior as “first of all a report on what people do, which raises no question of what they should do.” Through innovative interview techniques, Kinsey and his associates obtained extensive data on such seemingly taboo acts as masturbation, homosexual contact, and nonmarital intercourse. The results surprised many. Acts thought rare and morally out of bounds turned out to be fairly common. Taken together, the nonheterosexual, nonmarital acts outnumbered marital ones. Because individuals

engaged in a variety of acts, Kinsey classified people not dichotomously but along a spectrum. One was not gay or straight but engaged primarily in one or both sets of behavior. Assuming the role of the objective scientist, Kinsey dismissed the views of those who regarded some acts as immoral, criticizing those who did not “want to believe that there are gradations in these matters from one to the other extreme.”<sup>12</sup> For Kinsey, all acts were undertaken for sexual release, or “outlet,” and were biologically commensurate. In subsequent years, detractors criticized his emphasis on outlet for its assumption of a male norm of sexuality, but the measure also allowed Kinsey to challenge the belief that the vaginal orgasm was the consummate female sexual experience and to express concern that women were not achieving “outlet” on par with men.

Kinsey’s work struck a chord. Published by a small medical press, the *Reports* became best sellers. The male version (1948) sold nearly 250,000 copies, and its female counterpart (1954) eventually surpassed that figure. Americans had become, in the expression of the day, “Kinsey conscious.” Kinsey himself assumed celebrity status, mentioned in Cole Porter’s “Too Darn Hot” from *Kiss Me, Kate*. The reports spurred unprecedented public talk about sex and raised questions about what was normal. Many readers indicated to Kinsey that they sought reassurance by checking his charts and graphs to determine where they fell on his scales. Other readers had more pressing concerns. Many who were haunted by urges considered unnatural sought out help from Kinsey, who often advised that conventional moral standards bore little resemblance to human needs.

The reports were exceedingly controversial. Lay critics accused Kinsey of encouraging immoral and harmful behavior. Academics concentrated primarily on his methodology and his assumptions, pointing out the peculiarities of his sample. Though he wrote about the human male and female, his data was American. Even as a measure of the United States, the data were limited. As a number of critics noted at the time, his surveys overrepresented some groups (whites, middle-class women) and underrepresented or excluded others (African Americans were, for reasons Kinsey never made clear, excluded from the volume on female sexual behavior). To survey lower-class men (Kinsey wanted to account for differences in status, income, and age), the report used prisons on the debatable assumption that imprisonment was part of the lower-class cultural norm. Kinsey was also selective in the acts he chose to count, ignoring not just acts that did not lead to orgasm but also group sex, sadism, masochism, and transvestism as too marginal. As Sarah Igo has pointed out, the entire project had an ironic edge in that Kinsey envisioned his statistics as necessary to prevent an individual becoming

“unique and unexplainable except through an elaborate investigation of him as an isolated entity,” thus laying the groundwork for judging the “average” as “normal.”<sup>13</sup>

Many who studied the mind criticized not the reports’ revelations about homosexuality or extramarital sexuality but the naturalistic assumptions that concentrated on outlet to the detriment of meaning. All the information in the reports were unlikely to help Americans find themselves, psychiatrists charged, because they had nothing to say about internal states. By ignoring the complexity of consciousness, Kinsey reduced the self to mere biological reflexes and all choice to acting on impulse. By pruning the meaning of a sexual act to release of energy, Kinsey obfuscated the uniqueness of individual sexual lives. His description of sex made no mention of relationships, the institutional context in which sex took place. “Love,” which many critics took to be the culturally sanctioned goal of sex, was absent from the Kinsey investigations. The anthropologist Ashley Montagu complained that Kinsey’s report ignored emotions altogether. The literary critic Lionel Trilling argued that Kinsey equated the natural with the good, and quantity with quality. “Although,” Trilling wrote, “the Report directs the harshest language toward the idea of the Normal, saying that it has stood in the way of any true scientific knowledge of sex, it is itself by no means averse to letting the idea of the Natural develop quietly into the idea of the Normal.” That surreptitious assumption, Trilling continued, was why the Kinsey Report “has an extravagant fear of all ideas that do not seem to it to be, as it were, immediately dictated by simple physical fact.”<sup>14</sup> Margaret Mead charged that the report shared the faults of the culture it purported to measure, an emphasis on size, numbers, money, publicity, and sales.<sup>15</sup>

Opposition to Kinsey’s naturalism notwithstanding, many of his critics had become more receptive to crediting the biological foundations of selfhood. Both Mead and Montagu tempered the cultural relativism of their prewar and war writings. Their postwar work emphasized how physical differences shaped the impact of culture on individuals and constrained their ability to create their selves. Their culturalism did not vanish, but it was muted. Nowhere was this more apparent in their discussions of gendering.

Born Israel Ehrenberg in London in 1905, Montagu had begun his career by challenging the coherence of the concept of race in *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (1942). Race was not rooted in distinctive biological differences, he argued, since variation within racial groups was as great as among them. Nor did physical markers dictate mental or moral differences. In his draft of the UNESCO statement on race in 1950, Montagu drew on the vitalist biology of the anarchist Peter Kropotkin to insist

on a common human nature formed by a biological drive for cooperation. His denial of any mental and temperamental differences provoked scholarly criticism for its tendency to overgeneralize from limited evidence. His suggestions of racial equality also led to attacks for alleged communism, which cost him a position at Rutgers. Carving out a niche for himself as a public expert, he turned his attention to sex differences with *The Natural Superiority of Women* (1953).

Women, Montagu asserted, were naturally healthier and more intelligent than men because of their inclination for cooperation. Most importantly, women benefitted psychologically from their physical closeness to children. Montagu envisioned women as the agents of cooperation, altruism, and love. “*It is the function of women to teach men how to be human,*” he declared. Women’s biological makeup better suited them for bolstering human relations than for engaging in competitive or solitary pursuits. Given his cooperative ethos, Montagu emphasized female nurturing to give anthropological imprimatur to the gender divisions of American democracy. “It is not for nothing,” he continued, “that the Bolsheviks attempted to abolish the family and masculinize women, while the Nazis made informers of children against their parents, and put the State so much before the family that it became a behemoth that well-nigh destroyed everyone who was victimized by it.”<sup>16</sup> Although sometimes regarded as a precursor of modern feminism for his praise of female intelligence, creativity, and fellow feeling, Montagu was not so much urging a redistribution of power or pointing to new possibilities for women as consigning them to set roles. It was, the feminist Eve Merriam wrote, a risk-free meaningless compliment that given Montagu’s masculine privilege only re-enforced gender hierarchy.<sup>17</sup>

Mead might have made an even sharper biological turn. In 1958, Mead’s interest in biology as a factor in personality development had progressed to the point that she hired Barbara Heath, Sheldon’s former assistant, to do somatotypes in Papua New Guinea. By the early 1960s, she had found some affinity with Konrad Lorenz, the Austrian ethologist whose work on imprinting and aggression articulated perhaps the most prominent version of biological influence on formation of the self. Her postwar consideration of the biological determinants of self began with her *Male and Female* (1949). Mead argued that the biological divide between male and female was not limited to the obvious differences in sexual organs and role in reproduction. She discerned differences between men and women in energy, attention, perception, and initiative. She also insisted that the female self, whatever else it accomplished, was inextricably engaged with the emotional development of children since its body was the generator of mother love.

That anatomical differences generated different kinds of selves represented a change in emphasis from Mead's earlier work. *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935) stressed human flexibility and plasticity in sexual orientations, character traits, and role; *Male and Female* emphasized the universality of division and the limits of such plasticity. Mead not only emphasized the split between the sexes in childbirth and rearing but further contended that biological differences were at the base of all cultures. All cultures, she insisted, parceled out typical cultural traits along sexual lines. Crucially, however, cultures did not separate male and female in the same ways. There were, Mead argued, no personality traits that were exclusively male or female. Different cultures regarded beauty, intelligence, kindness, or friendliness in different ways. Bravery was not solely a male trait; women had no monopoly on cooperation. The spectrum of gender traits led Mead to declare that rigid gender roles were responsible for much "inequality and waste in the world."<sup>18</sup>

Squaring her recognition of biological difference with her hope for a more flexible expectations of women's personalities took some doing. As with her earlier work, *Male and Female* was both field research report and cultural criticism of the United States. She continued to criticize Americans' prudery about somatic functions (including sexual desire) and its inversion, the excessive eroticization of female bodies. Both prudery and eroticization inhibited their ability to feel at home in their own bodies (141). Mead was especially critical of the withdrawal of fathers from parenting responsibilities. Ironically it was American mothers who reminded boys to act like men. Absent fathers, Mead observed, demonstrated that America did not have a "women" problem but one of gender relations. "As surely as we believe that the present troublesome problems of sex adjustment are due to the position of women alone we commit ourselves to a long series of false moves as we attempt to push women out of the home, into the home, out of the home, adding mounting confusion of the difficulties born of a changing world" (299–301). Few moves were false as foreclosing the play of gender qualities.

Mead's treatment of flexibility in gender relations made *Male and Female* different from the widely circulated antifeminist tract *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (1947) by Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia Farnham, despite their common insistence on female docility and the essential nature of mother love. Lundberg and Farnham's screed excoriated American women for their unnatural abandonment of motherhood and domestic life. As a result of the feminist movement and war-time employment, American women no longer found satisfaction in childbearing. Mothers tended to be rejecting, overprotective, domineering, or overaffectionate in their treatment of children. The

result was neurotic and unhappy young people, who Lundberg and Farnham estimated constituted one-fourth to one-third of the population.<sup>19</sup>

Lundberg and Farnham were minor players in a larger conversation about the meaning and usefulness of Freud's theory of psychic development. A pitched debate took place between orthodox and neo-Freudians over the degree to which social institutions could shape, change, or cancel bodily impulses. Freud's understanding of the formation of the self had matured over the course of his career, but a fairly constant portion was libido theory. Freud held that *trieb* (alternatively translated as "drives" or "instinct") were fundamentally sexual in nature. Sexual energy focused on different zones at different moments in an individual's childhood, he believed. Fixation on certain parts would produce various psychopathologies. There were other dangers inherent in the effort to regulate drives that were, by Freud's definition, relentless and fundamentally antisocial. Regulation could be conscious (suppression), unconscious (repression through internalization of social prohibitions and norms), or channeled (sublimation). Freud envisioned the inner life of the individual as a state of perpetual psychic warfare, yet some psychic health was available to those who channeled sexual energy into work and love.<sup>20</sup>

Although revisionists accepted Freud's notion of a depth psychology in which unconscious motivation—retrievable through dreams, fantasies, and slips—accounted for much conscious behavior, they rejected his libido theory. "Neo-Freudian" revisionists such as Erik Erikson, Karen Horney, Harry Stack Sullivan, and Erich Fromm challenged the exclusive concentration on the erotic, Freud's hydraulic conception of energy that limited the amount available to an individual and the orthodox assertion of the universality of Oedipal conflict. Revisionists charged that empirical evidence was lacking for all these propositions. Others criticized Freud's version of female sexuality in which girls transfer desire from mother to father and yearn for a penis. All objected to a view of biological endowment as unalterable and proposed alternative theories in which the self—under the impress of nature *and* society—was more variable, dynamic, and contingent.<sup>21</sup>

With its emphasis on social context rather than biologically based drives, revisionism opened the possibility of connecting psychological development to political change. The most influential efforts in this vein came from Erich Fromm, who discerned commonalities between Freud and Marx. "Different as they were, they have in common an uncompromising will to liberate man, an equally uncompromising faith in truth as the instrument of liberation and the belief that the condition for this liberation lies in man's capacity to break the chain of illusion."<sup>22</sup> In Fromm's synthesis, advanced in many widely read



books published after the war, dynamic psychology provided the mechanism by which social existence gave rise to consciousness, while historical materialism contributed an etiology to why certain character types predominated at different times in human history. Fromm believed libidinal theory could not convincingly explain why a particular social class featured a particular character type. It was unlikely, he thought, that every petit bourgeois had anal fixations. If the human instinctual apparatus was not infinitely malleable, it nonetheless changed in response to the historical problems it faced. Fromm's revisionism was most apparent in his view of the family as the site where history conditioned structures of physical and psychic gratification. As long as it bestowed rewards attuned to its historical moment, the family would give rise to a typical character type. Should families cease to deliver rewards, the stage was set for the emergence of new character types and social change.<sup>23</sup>

If Fromm jettisoned orthodoxy for radical ends, others hewed to it for similar reasons. Although the analytic establishment used Freud to secure patient adjustment to normal social life, thinkers as diverse as Herbert Marcuse, Lionel Trilling, and the sociologist Dennis Wrong glimpsed in Freudian libido theory a source of opposition to the political and social status quo. They held that the drives did *not* set the self forever but opened possibilities for overturning social convention. Revisionists had treated nature as a form of determinism, but their work relied on what Wrong termed the oversocialized conception of "man." By ascribing social and cultural causation to an ingrained need for approval, Wrong charged, revisionism turned out at bottom to be a theory of conformity that viewed rebels as incompletely socialized.<sup>24</sup> Freud himself was dismissive of social revolution, but his conception of the self caught between drive and internalized restriction was a portrait of psychic struggle that always entailed some resistance to social claims. For defenders of libido theory, that struggle could result in the redirection of instincts for nonconformist ends. Literary critic Lionel Trilling valued Freud for his portrait of the self soaked in culture but always rebelling against its strictures. Biological imperatives enabled the Freudian self at least some refuge "beyond culture," especially when, as in postwar America, the culture smothered individuality in demands for reasonableness and affability in interactions with others.<sup>25</sup>

Trilling included Freud's death drive, which posited humans' tendency toward stasis and even destruction, as part of humanity's biological equipment. That drive—Thanatos—ruled out utopian visions. On this point the Marxist philosopher Marcuse demurred, reckoning that the unleashing of eros would break down capitalist society's conversion of sex energy into alienated labor and allow for social as well as individual emancipation. "The irreconcilable

conflict is not between work (reality principle) and Eros (pleasure principle), but between alienated labour (performance principle) and Eros,” Marcuse proclaimed.<sup>26</sup> Marcuse’s celebration of Eros to the exclusion of reason led him to flirt with the non-Marxist position that bodily pleasure was the sole measure of meaningful selfhood. Only later—in his *One-Dimensional Man* of 1964—did he realize the degree to which American culture might co-opt the supposedly liberating aspects of instinctual life in “repressive de-sublimation.” By encouraging and commodifying instant gratification, capitalist society drained energies that might otherwise be used in opposition to the prevailing order.

Although most debate revolved around how the body determined identity, there were instances where Americans imagined how self and body could be unconnected to reveal the plasticity of gender behavior. Some were played for fun, as in Billy Wilder’s film *Some Like It Hot* (1959), in which Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis dress and live as women to escape gangsters. Others, such as the case of Christine Jorgensen, went to the heart of body and identity. Although born with a penis, George William Jorgensen felt early on as a child that she was a woman trapped in a man’s body. Although psychoanalysts regarded such a condition as a mental illness, the result of improper identification with the properly sexed parent during early childhood, medical doctors regarded the condition as inadequate physical development of the proper sexual characteristics. Beginning hormone therapy with the husband of a classmate, Jorgensen traveled to Europe to have sex reassignment surgery that she completed in Denmark in 1951–1952. Jorgensen became an instant celebrity upon her return to the United States. Often an object of derisive humor, Jorgensen responded by adopting a glamorous and outgoing persona, quite different from her diffidence as a boy. Forbidden from marrying (her birth certificate indicated she was male), she nonetheless by her very existence demonstrated that gender was not a binary, incommensurate condition and that genitalia and chromosomes alone did not provide a completely solid foundation for identity.<sup>27</sup>

### The Crowd and the Lonely

Midcentury Americans were inveterate joiners. Such organizations as the Boy Scouts, Parent-Teachers Association, and the League of Women Voters experienced tremendous growth from 1950 to 1960, virtually doubling during the period. Even sales unfolded in informal group environments more like family gatherings than visits to a department store. The much-derided Tupperware company rolled out its much-derided product—plastic-covered

dishes intended to store leftovers—in 1948 and rose to cultural prominence and commercial success on the strength of its marketing at “Tupperware parties” of friends and neighbors. Many commentators complained about the pressure to belong and conform and the growing suspicion that attached to outsiders and loners. Yet observers also claimed the connections of bowling leagues and other civil society groups were thin and unfulfilling. Americans, they observed, had no real connections to one another and felt profoundly alone. In many ways, these seemingly opposite complaints were two sides of the same coin—the inability of American life to generate a meaningful relationship between individuals and society.

Although there is very little discussion of loneliness as the term is usually understood, David Riesman’s *Lonely Crowd* (1950) takes as its central problem the changing relationship of the self and others. Riesman developed an interest in sociology during his analysis with Erich Fromm. Originally, he and his assistants Reuel Denney and Nathan Glazer set out to investigate apathy during the 1948 presidential election but they turned instead to a study of the history of character. Riesman found that the United States was in the midst of a change in the predominant character type. During the pioneer stage of economic development, the modal American was inner directed: individuals acted in accord with an internalized code and defined identity in terms of accomplishments at work. With the rise of bureaucracy and mass communications, Riesman argued, an emergent type—the other-directed—gained traction. Other-directed people took their cues from social expectations and found fulfillment in leisure and consumption. Where the inner-directed experienced guilt for violating an internalized moral code, the other-directed underwent anxiety over whether they would win the approval of their peers.

Many readers interpreted *The Lonely Crowd* as a lament about the rise of the other-directed personality, a new type of American at once conformist, insecure, and dependent. They regarded Riesman’s portrait of the inner-directed man as an elegy for a world in which assuredness and ambition were paramount. Work groups, many bemoaned, had no room for individualists who lived according to an internalized set of moral principles. A 1954 *Time* magazine cover reinforced the impression. It featured a man in a business suit with a radar transmitter on his back looking to the future and the Victorian figure with a compass moving back into the mists of the past while the faceless masses congregated behind the bespectacled Riesman, whom the story itself depicted as well adjusted and social.<sup>28</sup> Riesman denied he was simply lamenting the decline of nineteenth-century individualism or criticizing conformity as such. Riesman was clear: the issue was *how*, not whether, a society induces conformity. The inner-directed personality was not particularly admirable, he

explained, noting the constricted and parochial nature of moral code. The inner-directed man may have had his internal compass, but the circle of others whom he accepted was quite small and his inner censor could be severe and unforgiving. Inner direction may have suited the class-conflict ridden stage of capitalism but was hardly the model for personal freedom in the modern age.<sup>29</sup>

Often ignored in the interpretation of the book was Riesman's consideration of the virtues of other-direction. The other-directed, he noted, conformed out of "greater resonance with others, a heightened self-consciousness about relations to people, and a widening of the circle with whom one wants to feel in touch." The other-directed self was aware of others and had the capacity to be more sensitive, tolerant, and flexible. Riesman contended that the other-directed were more prone to examining inner life and better suited to a world in which work had been so degraded that it could no longer form the basis of a worthwhile identity.<sup>30</sup> Looking elsewhere for meaning opened the possibility of more empathetic relations with others.

Yet readers rightly found a lamentful tone in *The Lonely Crowd*, as Riesman himself tacitly conceded in clarifications of his position in subsequent editions of the book.<sup>31</sup> Other-direction enabled insincere glad-handing and mood engineering designed to influence vaguely dis comforted individuals uncertain about whether or not they fit in. Because they drew identity from consumption rather than work, other-directeds were especially vulnerable to swings in fashion. Like Arthur Miller's Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* (1949), other-directeds were often convinced they had "sterling traits of character" and "a pleasing personality" and then found it difficult to face reality. Riesman was aware as well that impression management could work its way from business to family and school, and that an other-directed society could be characterized by "false personalization" in which the boundaries between the personal and the public erode, saturating all interactions with an inauthentic intimacy. Further investigations of coteries of college students revealed that those with group orientations did not in fact always care about others' well-being, as Riesman had posited they would.

The most tantalizing but least realized portion of the book was Riesman's discussion of "autonomy." Riesman believed that since the problem of production had been virtually solved, freedom was now a psychosocial rather than a material challenge. Although Riesman had noted in a letter to Denney the possibility that alienation could be a legitimate response to a society that bore down too heavily on individuals, he ultimately tended to regard the condition as anomie, the breakdown of social connection and norms. More preferable was autonomy, which he conceded was relatively rare, especially in a regime of outer-direction. He envisioned autonomy achieved through

membership in multiple communities, and in creative consumption—by which he meant knowledgeable use of an item, and the ability to know and master one’s own desires. Creativity was possible even amid the general joylessness of modern life. The details remained exceedingly vague, however. In response, Daniel Bell termed Riesman a prophet of play who overemphasized the degree to which consumption yielded the kind of freedom he wanted. Indeed, by the late 1960s Riesman had his own doubts about “autonomy,” worrying that efforts to go one’s own way had become willful efforts to depart from norms for their own sake, as if eccentricity proved one was not other-directed.

Others popular sociological investigators were far less subtle than Riesman. Both William Whyte and Vance Packard were deeply critical of institutional exploitation of individuals’ fears of being different. Whyte and Packard regarded the corporation as the nerve center of a collectivist culture in which ostensibly free individuals abandoned their individuality to insure smooth group dynamics. In such a culture, “keeping up with the Joneses” stemmed less from a desire for material improvement than a hope for psychic relief. Whyte borrowed George Orwell’s term *groupthink* from his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to describe the new pressure for conformity, which carried with it the creation of a new compliant personality type. “Groupthink” flowed from the cubicles of the corporation to the A-frames of suburbia, with, as the Malvina Reynolds’s song had it, its “little boxes” made of “ticky-tacky” all in a row. The similarity of the exteriors signified the conformity inside what Betty Friedan later called “a comfortable concentration camp.” Packard directed his criticism at modern institutions of manipulation and standardization, such as advertising, product design, and public relations. However influential, Packard and Whyte’s broadsides proved wildly overstated. The suburbs, including the supposed epitome of conformity, Levittown, were much less conformist than they claimed. Nor could either author offer any meaningful way to oppose conformity. The best alternative that Whyte could offer was an appendix on cheating on personality tests.<sup>32</sup>

Whyte and Packard’s lament for the decline of autonomous self found echoes in the popular film genre that enjoyed something of a heyday in midcentury, the Western. The typical 1950s Western probed the social and cultural conflict that arose when rugged individualism lost its social utility. At odds with the direction of history, Western heroes constantly drift or die. Ostensibly a celebration of the lone hero’s self-assuredness and unshakeable determination, midcentury Westerns have a melancholic feel. Heroic bold action ends with complete alienation from the community. John Wayne’s Tom in Howard Hawks’s *Red River* (1948) is a rugged individualist par ex-

cellence who demands others bend to his will. He regards others' needs as a personal attack and treats compromise as weakness. During a crucial cattle drive, his violent and inhumane behavior boils over in a mutiny led by his adopted son, Montgomery Clift's Matt, whom in a reversal of the Oedipal drama Tom vows to kill. In the case of *Shane* (1953), the titular character is caught between his gunslinging nature and his desire to put his past away. When a cattle baron and his henchmen attempt to engress the fertile land of the valley, threatening the farm family where Shane works and boards, he abandons his pledge, killing the treacherous baron and his hired guns in a showdown. Though the young boy who idolizes him wants Shane to "come back," Shane intuitively understands the impossibility of a self like his living peaceably with others, even as his skills constitute a precondition for society. In *High Noon* (1952) the incompatibility lies in the unprincipled conformity of those who compose respectful society. Hearing that a criminal he had once sent to jail was returning to exact his revenge, sheriff Will Kane (Gary Cooper) feels it incumbent to stand his ground, even though he was about to leave for the East with his new bride. Efforts to recruit help are unavailing, and Kane faces the onslaught alone (with the help of his Quaker wife, forced to recognize the need to use violence to defeat evil). Often taken as an allegory for Hollywood cravenness in the face of HUAC threats, the film earned praise for Kane's doing what was right when others would not.<sup>33</sup>

Placing the Western in the present day only exacerbated the incongruity of the autonomous hero. In *Lonely Are the Brave* (1962), written by the once-blacklisted Dalton Trumbo from eco-anarchist Edward Abbey's novel *The Brave Cowboy*, loner Jack Burns (Kirk Douglas) proves unable to function in modernity. The film drives the point home from the beginning where Burns, at home on the range, is discombobulated by screaming jets, gear-shifting trucks that make highway crossings on a horse nearly impossible, and barbed-wire fences that block free passage. Burns makes the trek from the New Mexico mountains to free his friend Paul, who has been jailed for smuggling Mexican refugees into the country. Once in town, Burns sets out to get arrested so he can break Paul out of jail with hacksaw blades he has smuggled into the prison. When family man Paul decides the costs of jail break are greater than doing the time, Burns escapes by himself. Chased by the forces of law and order with its radios and helicopters up the Sandia Mountains, Burns temporarily manages to evade capture, even shooting down a copter. Yet in the midst of trying to cross a highway, his horse once again spooks and Burns is hit by a truck carrying, in an excess of symbolism, a load of toilets.

Douglas secured the rights and hired Trumbo to tell a story about the impossibility of authentic individuality in a mass society bent on classifying and regulating its citizens. Burns has no ID cards because he knows who he is. He rejects fences and “No Trespassing” signs because they represent society’s encroachment on his freedom. Director David Miller reinforced the point visually by showing the mountains and deserts of New Mexico in panoramic shots that emphasized the openness and freedom of nature, while shooting the machinery and enclosed rooms of civilized society in claustrophobic close-ups. In the end, of course, modern civilization would prove triumphant and doom folks like Burns. Yet Trumbo punctuated the requiem for the independent self with a caveat. Burns tells Jerry, Paul’s wife, with whom he was once in love, that he was unfit for marriage, “Know what a loner is? He’s a born cripple. He’s a cripple because the only person he can live with is himself. It’s his life, the way he wants to live. It’s all for him. A guy like that, he’d kill a woman like you. Because he couldn’t love you, not the way you are loved.” Such a scene can be read as an equation of solitude with selfishness. It might also be understood as a reaffirmation of gender differences: only men have the wherewithal to live as they want to live.

Another, less conventional, version of authentic individuality free from social constraints arrived via the Beats, the best known midcentury bohemians. Convinced that normal American life demanded sterile routines that denied individuals genuine freedom, the motley collection of writers, poets, and artists stridently asserted their rejection of social norms that, by their lights, repressed impulses, outlawed meaningful experience, and demanded standardization of thought, feeling, and action. In reaction to a society that was overly sentimental and inauthentic, Beats adopted an attitude of cool, a reserved distance from established ways.<sup>34</sup> In contrast to middle-class norms of restraint and caution, Beats favored spontaneity. Rejecting mainstream conventions, Beats embraced the margins of society, seeking out the company of criminals, drugs addicts, deviants, and denigrated minorities. Jack Kerouac gave expression to the Beat posture when he had Sal Paradise, the narrator of his 1957 novel, *On the Road*, declare “the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones that never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn” and celebrate the black community of Denver because “the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night.”<sup>35</sup>

Most unsympathetic commentators regarded Beats as conformist in their nonconformity and juvenile in their reaction against adult norms of responsible behavior. Writing in the *Partisan Review*, Norman Podhoretz lambasted

their worship of primitive energy: "The plain truth is that the primitivism of the Beat Generation serves first of all as a cover for an anti-intellectualism so bitter that it makes the ordinary American's hatred of eggheads seem positively benign."<sup>36</sup> Others rightly criticized their racial stereotyping in the guise of admiration and their blatant misogyny. In many respects, however, the Beats were less distant from the mainstream than they first appeared. In their search for authenticity free from social boundaries and expectations, they captured, albeit in an unusual form, the postwar worries about "groupthink" crushing independent selfhood. Most Americans did not, of course, have affinity for madness, Eastern religion, or the mysticism of William Blake. Nor did they stand ready to jettison the self altogether as William Burroughs did when he observed that the Beats needed to learn "to exist with no religion, no country, no allies" and "to live alone in silence."<sup>37</sup> Many Americans did, however, share a sense that avenues for authentic selfhood were somehow impaired, even if they did not hit the road or reject white-collar careers.

Beat spontaneity was hardly a consistent philosophy, despite its poaching from Buddhism and other spiritual traditions. Far more sophisticated in its consideration of the meaning and dilemmas of identity was existentialism. Although as historian George Cotkin has argued, several strains of American thought had long developed existential themes, the philosophy did not take hold until European versions arrived in the mid-twentieth century. The theological works of Soren Kierkegaard, introduced through the efforts of neo-Orthodox Episcopal minister Walter Lowrie, led figures as diverse as Reinhold Niebuhr, Will Herberg, Whittaker Chambers, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. to temper or reject their once-expansive hopes for social transformation. Existentialism gathered steam with New York intellectuals' discovery and promotion of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus in the mid-1940s, but each of the three French writers had unsatisfactory visits to the United States. Their hosts criticized the existentialists for their flirtation with Marxism (Camus being an exception), shallow knowledge of Freud, and posturing for the media. Nonetheless, existentialism remained attractive as a philosophy of authenticity that enjoined individuals to create their identities as singular, unique beings. More than the pose of Greenwich Village coffeehouse habitués, existentialism proved a bracing challenge and support for those seeking to understand where they stood in a world without fixed moral or philosophical foundations. One sign of the movement's success in the United States was the appearance of genealogies such as Hazel Barnes's *The Literature of Possibility* (1957) and Walter Kaufmann's *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1956). By the mid-1960s, existentialism had profoundly affected the novelists Anne Rice



and Marge Piercy, the feminist Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, and radicals Tom Hayden and Robert Moses, and, ironically, given their opposing sexual politics, Betty Friedan and Norman Mailer.<sup>38</sup>

Existentialism defined the human condition as strikingly individual. Though humans live in groups, our consciousness and our death were ours alone. Where determinisms wrongly subsumed particulars under abstract and ultimately meaningless concepts, existentialism stressed contingencies and countered that truths were made, not discovered. At the core of things was the necessity of human choice. It was the inescapability of making choices and creating an identity that gave meaning to the famous Sartrean aphorism that existence precedes essence.<sup>39</sup> Because they committed an individual to a particular course—"either/or" in the parlance rather than "both/and"—choices could not be fudged. Even though the world was absurd in the sense that meaning was not given, having to make a choice conferred on life a seriousness, demanding that individuals assume responsibility for whom one was and whom one became. One could not evade the responsibility of choice even if one occupied a lowly social position or suffered oppressive conditions. That was the nub of Camus's "Myth of Sisyphus." Condemned to the absurdity of forever pushing a boulder up a mountain, Sisyphus nonetheless differed from the boulder because he retained the ability to deny fate and make deliberate choices about what he would do. Sartre likewise insisted on the inescapability of choice and labeled any denial of responsibility for one's situation as "bad faith." Borrowing from phenomenological discussion of consciousness, Sartre asserted resignation denied our awareness, however dim and distant, that we are always more than ourselves. For existentialists there was no greater inauthenticity than accepting social conventions without passionate engagement and choice.<sup>40</sup>

Although Sartre once wrote "hell is other people," existentialists were wary of blithe libertarianism and exclusive self-regard. Having condemned the bad faith of acquiescing in a socially imposed identity, existentialists also challenged the bad faith of pretending antecedent conditions had no effect whatsoever, as if all things were possible. One of those antecedent conditions was society itself, which led the French existentialists to political concerns. For de Beauvoir, authenticity required an open future that extends itself by opening the freedom of others. Both she and Sartre sought to demonstrate that the credo "Existentialism is a Humanism" that Sartre had celebrated in 1945 was compatible with a Marxist theory of social causation. But Sartre's effort to weave together collective and individual action in his 1960 *Critique of Dialectical Reason* was at best only partially successful: the existentialist conception of free choice fit awkwardly with historical materialism.

The liberal Camus regarded such a project as dangerously utopian because it justified political positions on the grounds of historical necessity. Doing so necessarily drained choice and values from political action and substituted revolutionary fervor for regard for others. Concerned to keep means and ends in balance, Camus opted for a reformist politics that might accommodate the positions of others. That stance could flounder on the search for an unachievable middle ground, as was the case with his untenable hope that a compromise might be found to the Algerian crisis that allowed French nationals to maintain their unique place in the colony while honoring the desire of indigenous Algerians for independence. Camus nonetheless proved tremendously inspiring for Americans eager for a new politics that combined the individual authenticity of social opposition with an acceptance of legitimate social bonds. His influence could be found in such documents of the New Left as “A Tract for the Times,” the editorial launching *Liberation* magazine in 1956, and *The Port Huron Statement* produced by the fledgling Students for a Democratic Society six years later. Camus’s influence rang loud and clear in the *Statement*’s preoccupation with “values” and authenticity. “The goal of man and society should be human independence,” its authors contended: “a concern not with image of popularity but with finding a meaning in life that is personally authentic; a quality of mind not compulsively driven by a sense of powerlessness, nor one which unthinkingly adopts status values, nor one which represses all threats to its habits, but one which has full, spontaneous access to present and past experiences, one which easily unites the fragmented parts of personal history, one which openly faces problems which are troubling and unresolved; one with an intuitive awareness of possibilities, an active sense of curiosity, an ability and willingness to learn.”<sup>41</sup>

Worry over the legitimacy of social bonds accounted for the constant talk at midcentury about alienation and the near ubiquity of the phrase *failure to communicate*. It surfaced as well in the widespread prominence of loneliness as a theme in postwar culture. Works as diverse as Nicholas Ray’s *In a Lonely Place* (1950), Hank Williams’s “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry” (1949), H. J. J. Straelen’s introduction to existentialism, *Man, the Lonely* (1952), Dorothy Day’s autobiography, *The Long Loneliness* (1952), Chester Himes’s *Lonely Crusade* (1947), Margaret Wood’s social psychological exploration, *Paths to Loneliness* (1953), and Clark Moustakas’s psychological-cum-philosophical investigation of *Loneliness* (1961) raised the question of how to make meaningful connections in an age of impersonality. Such concerns contributed to a new meaning for the word *lonely*. Previous generations had understood the term to mean feelings arising from being physically alone, the consequence of being friendless or losing a loved one. They regarded loneliness as an

inescapable part of life. After the war, the term also came to signify feelings of insufficient or unrewarding social connections, feelings that were liable to arise at any moment or with any interaction. Modern loneliness implied something askew in social relations or something lacking in the kinds of people such relations produced. “Only connect,” E. M. Forster wrote in *Howard’s End*, but many worried that connection was simply not possible in postwar America.

No one at midcentury did a more thorough job of showing the contrast between ideals of togetherness and the less palatable truths of American life than photographer Robert Frank (1924–2019). His *Americans* (1958), criticized at the time for being politically unacceptable and aesthetically bankrupt, has since taken on iconic status. Born to a Swiss Jewish family, Frank came to United States in 1947, working first as a fashion photographer. With the help of famed photographer Walker Evans, Frank won a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1955 to photograph wide swathes of American life. Traveling from coast to coast over the course of two years, Frank took some twenty-eight thousand shots, of which eighty-three were eventually published in the book. Initially unable to find an American publisher, primarily because of his departure from prevailing norms in focus and lighting, Frank succeeded with the French publisher Robert Delpire in 1958 before landing with Grove Press in the United States the following year. Aiding Grove Press’s decision was the introduction provided by Jack Kerouac, who praised Frank for having “sucked a sad poem right out of America onto film, taking rank among the tragic poets of the world.”<sup>42</sup> Within the next three years, he had major shows at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Museum of Modern Art.

Frank’s aesthetic choices underwrote his thematic ones. His sense that the United States was a lonely, often bleak place stemmed not simply from his experiences as an émigré but his long-standing opposition to sentimentality and beauty in art. He fretted that beauty obscured broader social implications: perfect composition would make it less likely that the viewer would move beyond the frame. In contrast to professional photographers, Frank preferred blurred, grainy, and muddy exposures that he believed opened access to the underlying forces and truth of a situation. Frank rejected lighting that directed viewers to the expressive features of common humanity, opting instead to capture Americans with blank or tormented looks. In his pictures of sparsely populated bars, marching bands in which instruments obscure musicians’ faces, and automobile drivers and passengers cropped to give the impression of unknown destinations and separation from the environments, Frank put a punctuation point on his sense of the desolation of American life.<sup>43</sup>

Americans' inability to connect with one another was especially clear in two of his downtown New Orleans photographs. The first captures pedestrians trying to make their way, only to find themselves impeded by a stream heading the other way. Like particles in Brownian motion, they collide, streaming this way and that. All are caught in grim and unsmiling profile. No one is looking at anyone else (one person is taking a wary glance at us, the audience). Some are looking down. Together they create a mass that extends the entire width of the frame. Determined to move onward, they appear to have neither connection with anyone else despite the claustrophobic quality of the image, nor apparent destination—a graphic representation of a lonely crowd. The second, more iconic image captures the agonies of urban segregation. The photo, which graced the original cover, was titled “Trolley New Orleans.” In typical Jim Crow fashion, whites sit in the front and blacks in the rear. All passengers are looking out at us with varying emotions, ranging from contempt or dismissal from the white woman in the second row to anguish on the face of the black man two rows behind her. It is clearly a warm day since the windows are opened. The raised windows distort the reflection from the street, and we can make out what might be apartment buildings, bridges, or pedestrians. Whatever they are, they shimmer like mirages. The open windows create an impression of cells in which each of the passengers is sealed off from his or her fellows, an effect driven home by the longing in their looks and the glistering jambs.

Frank did not arrange his photos in chronological order. Nor did he set out to tell a particular story. He did have themes to which he returned, however—automobiles, bars, race, and, perhaps most poignant of all, flags. Frank deployed flags not as a symbol of unity but as unfamiliar and divisive objects. In “Parade—Hoboken, New Jersey,” the American flag serves to decapitate. Rather than depicting a parade, the picture shows two apartment dwellers looking out at a parade, or so we assume. The woman in the left window is not fully visible. A white shade is partially drawn, creating a deep shadow. We are only able to make out her chin and mouth. Between the windows is an unfurled flag blowing in the breeze. Fairly taut, it blows in such a way to make the face of the second woman invisible to us. The flag dominates the composition but it ensures Americans remain unknown to each other. The reality of division stands against the ideal of unity.

The counterpart of Frank in painting was George Tooker (1920–2011). Born in Brooklyn, trained by the famed Depression-era illustrator and chronicler of New York life Reginald Marsh, Tooker adopted a style of figurative representation, unusual juxtapositions, bleak lighting, and ambiguous or complex perspectives, a style that he called “reality impressed on the mind

so hard that it returns as a dream.” Often grouped with Edward Hopper for their common concentration on isolation, Tooker nonetheless insisted that in contrast to Hopper’s realism, his paintings were fantasies or reveries of a world drained of human interaction, deep emotion, and individual initiative. His figures shuffle rather than walk and often seem isolated, imprisoned, or estranged. Typically an oppressive architecture overwhelms them, as the anonymity and standardization of modern life defines their environment. This approach dominates such works of midcentury as *The Subway* (1950), *Government Bureau* (1955–1956), and *Waiting Room* (1959). In *Subway*, the effects of mass society in all its horror impresses itself on the viewer almost immediately. The multiple vanishing points, the confining cubicles in which numerous people wait or hide, the depressed sorrowful or blank expressions on the riders’ faces, the metal grating, and the terror in the eyes of the woman at the center of the painting all heighten the effect of human alienation. Tooker claimed the subway was the epitome of “a denial of the senses and a negation of life itself.”<sup>44</sup>

The most accomplished chronicler of loneliness in song was Frank Sinatra, who created an unparalleled body of work that moved beyond predictable laments and conveyed how loneliness dissolved facades and personas to reveal the essential vulnerability of postwar life. Born in 1915, Sinatra had achieved 1940s success singing for a number of large bands, including Tommy Dorsey and Harry James. A teen idol in the mid-1940s, he hit a rough patch thereafter in which he was reduced to doing novelty songs. Released from his Columbia contract, he staged a comeback in the 1950s with an Oscar for his role in *From Here to Eternity* (1953) and sixteen albums for Capitol, in which he reinvented himself as a mature, complex singer. The Capitol albums were less random collections of songs than cohesive wholes, organized around a theme or concept. Some featured the hip Sinatra, a jaunty and charming rogue with a jazz sensibility. Contrasting with the swinging Sinatra was the lonely one, who could not transcend the damages of his failed love life and went through his daily life unconnected to and unaware of others. In albums such as *In the Wee Small Hours* (1955), *Where Are You?* (1957), *Only the Lonely* (1958)—which Sinatra called his favorite—and *No One Cares* (1959), Sinatra revealed a self crumbling under the pressure of isolation. Bolstering the effect was the album art, which portrayed a devastated Sinatra in ways few stars of his stature would have allowed. *Only the Lonely* featured Sinatra obscured by a black background so that only half his face is discernible and the visible part touched with red highlights on lips, nose, and eyes to give the impression of a crying clown. *No One Cares* has him sitting alone and forlorn bathed in light while all around him couples socialize.<sup>45</sup>

Sinatra's 1950s work subtly explored the varieties of loneliness, revealing a self insecure even when appearing confident to others. With the help of arrangers Nelson Riddle and Gordon Jenkins, Sinatra summoned a complex psychological landscape full of precariousness and disquiet. These effects owed much to Sinatra's talents and musical intelligence. His celebrated breath control enabled him to emulate both the operatic bel canto style, which varied legato and staccato passages while frequently altering tempo, and Dorsey's trombone virtuosity. With his flexible phrasing and accenting, Sinatra mastered a conversational style of singing that enabled him to project a variety of vulnerabilities, in contrast to the strident, even parodic, masculinity of his "swinging" albums. In fraying his voice or shifting between major and minor keys without musical resolution, Sinatra constructed a singing self that lacked poise and closure. In those cases, where the song, like an operatic recitative, lacked a real tune, Sinatra captured the midcentury despair at the inability of the self to find its center in social life.

Sinatra skillfully moved in his so-called down albums between gloom, resignation, and disorientation. The immediate causes were failed love affairs or the inability to shake a depressed state that itself intensifies the blows that others delivered. At times reflective, at others accepting, and still others defeated, Sinatra's songs of loneliness were a marked contrast to the bromides of national happiness and formulaic popular songs like Nelson's that mention, not inhabit, loneliness. In "Stormy Weather" on *No One Cares*, Sinatra's voice begins full in a lower register, but as he realizes that he just can't get his "poor self together," his accents begin to fall irregularly. In his rendition of Rodgers and Hart's "Spring Is Here" on *Only the Lonely*, Sinatra achieves great effect in singing in minor key on the wrong accent when singing about moments that should normally make one merry. One would expect that the rebirth that comes with a new season should produce a dancing heart. His confession that loneliness puts an end to ambition and desire is dragged out and slurred. Alienation from others is especially clear in a song that would appear at his concerts well into the 1980s, "Angel Eyes." The contrast between the happy drinking people and the singer is palpable, made all the more poignant by change in tempo and modulation of volume. In the beginning of the song, Sinatra is fighting against the music: it is light, he is dark. His mood prevails, however, and the celebratory tone of the music disappears. By the end, the protective coverings are stripped away, and so too is the singer. As he sings, "Excuse me, while I disappear."

The problem of loneliness generated calls for adopting a cheery attitude, joining groups, and, should those fail to alleviate feelings, therapy. The tendency to treat the somber feelings that accompany being alone as a problem

led a few writers to assert that not all states of aloneness were detrimental to a meaningful sense of self. Psychologist Clark Moustakas (1923–2012) maintained that the reflexive flight from solitude was an effort to avoid inner life and ran the risk of self-alienation and feelings of inferiority. Those “not open enough, flexible enough, expansive enough to attach” themselves “to new personas and find value in new experiences” were frightened to face loneliness. Solitude—even when the result of traumatic loss—provoked an “intense and timeless awareness of the Self which allows for new sensitivities and awareness, and which results in bringing a person deeply in touch with his own existence and in touch with others in a fundamental sense.”<sup>46</sup> Moustakas concentrated on particularly vivid or life-changing experiences such as the sudden and severe illness of children, war injuries, the dread evoked by mountain climbing or exploring the unknown, political trials and tribulations (he mentions both Alger Hiss and Whittaker Chambers), but he insisted that conscious acceptance of loneliness would help with quotidian living. The Catholic convert and social activist Dorothy Day (1897–1980) experienced the new self that emerged from loneliness as rebirth in religious terms. Solitude enabled her to become aware of the full extent of her sinfulness and realize that true selfhood existed in a religious community involved in the life of others.<sup>47</sup> Day’s loneliness and Moustakas’ loneliness were not, it should be said, the usual experience of the time.

### The Young and the Restless

Few discussions of the 1950s fail to mention the species known as the American teenager, identifiable by its common experience of high school and its own particular culture and behavioral repertoire. As Joseph Kett has demonstrated, before the twentieth century Americans were unaccustomed to thinking of the teen years as a distinct period devoted to experimentation and preparation for adulthood, or to assume that puberty was accompanied by emotional turbulence. The first full articulation of youth as a transitional state suspended between childhood and adulthood was the psychologist G. Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence* (1904). Hall saw the condition as one of storm and stress, marked by conflict with parents, mood swings, and risky behavior. “Youth,” he wrote, “awakes to a new world and understands neither it nor himself.”<sup>48</sup>

Hall’s concept was the province of experts rather until the term *teenager* came into general use at midcentury, initially as a marker for a group that had enough disposable income to constitute a market segment ripe for commercial exploitation. In very short order, “teenager” came to signify not

only Hall's storm and stress but also insecurities about standing with peers and career choices. Adults recognized American adolescents as a distinctive breed. According to a famous post-*Sputnik Life* magazine story, they were the reverse of their Soviet counterparts. Where Soviet teenagers were dedicated to their studies and committed to the success of their nation, Americans obsessed over dating, sports, and possession of the latest consumer goods. The characterization of American teenagers as consumed by the pursuit of fun, fun, fun was clearly a limited one. Not only did it obscure the threat of nuclear annihilation that haunted the future, it also defined fun in ways more typical of white, middle-class teenagers than the activities of other young people. Indeed, authorities often linked the amusements and practices of racial minorities and working-class teenagers with juvenile delinquency.<sup>49</sup>

Adult puzzlement about teenagers stimulated numerous reports from the field. As is often the case for voyages to unknown lands, the accounts were diametrically opposed to one another. The classic conception of the teenage state was psychoanalyst Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society* (1951). Best known for its psychological elaboration of the concept of identity, the book melded the biological and social struggles on the road to adulthood in a way that drew upon Erikson's training and inclinations. Born in 1902 in Frankfurt, uncertain who was his father (which, biographers have speculated, accounts for his interest in identity), he migrated in 1927 to Vienna to teach at a school designed for children whose parents were in treatment with Anna Freud. At her urging, he enrolled at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute, where he received his diploma in 1933. Harassed by the Nazis, he and his wife, Joan, set sail for the United States that same year. Using his contacts in the culture and personality school of anthropologists—Edward Sapir, Margaret Mead, Alfred Kroeber, and Ruth Benedict—Erikson spent time observing the Sioux and the Yoruk before taking a position at the University of California. Those observations bore fruit in his emphasis in *Childhood and Society* on the culture-bound nature of personality development. Critical of efforts to enforce conformity by edict, he left the Berkeley campus in the early 1950s in protest of the requirement that faculty sign loyalty oaths.

*Childhood and Society* laid out eight stages of life, each of which linked biological development to what Erikson termed a psychosocial crisis. As individuals attempt to master the bodily functions and the corresponding life task associated with each stage, they encounter a set of conflicts that raise larger existential questions about identity. So the initial stage of life in which the infant struggles with oral mastery and negotiates between inside and outside is rooted in the relationship with the mother and raises the question of trust. Subsequent stages involve bowel control and muscle control, which



involved negotiating conflicts between autonomy and shame and doubt, and initiative and guilt, respectively. Erikson's sequence is cumulative: successful negotiation of the crisis of each stage yields rewards or "virtues." A child who negotiates the trust-mistrust psychosocial challenge will emerge with hope. Passing through the second stage with a sense of autonomy rather than shame or doubt, for instance, bestows the virtue of will. Although Erikson posed one pole of the challenge as the optimal or desirable force, he was well aware that both were needed for healthy living. Some mistrust of others is surely warranted, as is retaining some reserves of shame and doubt. Those who could not balance psychosocial forces or interact with the outside world in productive ways could, Erikson maintained, pass on to the next stage, but the residue of the unsuccessful challenge would reassert itself in problems in later life.<sup>50</sup>

The contrast with Freudian orthodoxy was marked. Rather than emphasize the conflicts between nature and social demands in the early years of life that endowed individuals with a characteristic stock of psychic responses, Erikson treated each stage as important in its own right. Working from the position that the ego had its own claims and was not necessarily at the mercy of the more powerful id and superego, Erikson contended that adolescence was not simply a consequence of Oedipal struggles but an important component of an ongoing process.

Given the importance Erikson assigned to the tasks of adolescence, his fifth stage, which happens between the onset of puberty and nineteen, might be the most crucial moment in this theory of personality development. Erikson viewed that stage as a time of struggle between identity (a continuous and stable sense of one's character, qualities, and goals) and role confusion (the inability to settle upon appropriate ways of being and achieve detente between self and society). Successful resolution of that psychosocial conflict entailed integrating memories of what one had been in the past with anticipations of what one hoped to be in the future. Easier said than done, because adolescents were still uncertain of their physical and mental powers and intensely sensitive to how they appeared to others. If the task of identity is frustrated, much antisocial destructive behavior followed. As complicated as the stage could be, most adolescents do find an identity. Crucial to success was parental allowance for experimentation. Parents who do open up space for a "moratorium," Erikson advised, will generally find that their children have developed a full-blown identity in which they have reestablished boundaries and learned to negotiate a sometimes hostile world.

Although adolescence took place during a specific point in the life cycle and was essential to identity formation, Erikson insisted that the content

of adolescence varied from culture to culture, a point he developed further in his psycho-biographical studies of Luther and Gandhi.<sup>51</sup> Nature alone did not dictate how adolescence would be experienced or how the psychosocial conflict would be resolved. Drawing on his anthropological work, Erikson concluded that adolescence was best understood as an experiment in constituting and reconstituting fragmentary selves. Because the purpose of identity was to help individuals adapt to historical change, there was never just one successful resolution of the identity crisis but a number of reasonable ones.

The process would always be more or less tumultuous, but it need not, the European Erikson maintained, be as severe and disorienting as it was in the United States. American adolescents were ill-equipped because their culture favored constant reinvention in the quest of singularity, and American institutions were far too impermanent to guide transitions. Worried about the effects of mass society, Erikson deplored the ways incessant preparation for success resulted in a population of “overadjusted” teenagers pushed to a premature resolution of the psychosocial crisis. The prime purveyors of what he called the “social jungle of human existence” was “Mom” (punctuation in the original), a composite, stereotypical entity who managed her children’s lives. The overcontrolling, castrating mother, made famous by Philip Wylie’s *Generation of Vipers* (1942), received much criticism for building weak children during midcentury. Erikson’s “Mom” continually regulated her children’s behavior in an ostensible attempt to help her children become independent but which resulted in hidden guilts and resentments that created a near permanent dependence.<sup>52</sup>

Despite his unorthodox approach to psychoanalytic theory, Erikson endorsed Freud’s observation that a healthy self was capable of work and love. One constant criticism of American teenagers was that they were far too obsessed with the latter—or at least with sex, a result many claimed resulted from the now-familiar complaint about lax parental supervision. Marynia Farnham advanced that argument in *The Adolescent* (1951), which iterated the criticisms of American mothers in her *Modern Woman*. Although she acknowledged American teenagers were caught between physical maturity and social prohibition, Farnham did not recommend the loosening of moral strictures (or, find avenues for sublimation) but espoused stricter supervision. The problems of youth lay with parents who mistakenly believed that “youngsters can make all the decisions for themselves and that uncurbed freedom is their right from birth on.”<sup>53</sup> She offered little sense of the arena in which teenagers might try out identity and, in contrast to Mead, insisted that children were the sole responsibility of the American wife, too many of

whom “deserted the home for the supposedly more rewarding and exiting life of rivalry with men” (211).

Based on his observation of ten Chicago-area high schools in 1961, sociologist James Coleman worried if reestablishing control was even possible. In his view, American teenagers had created a counterculture. Walled off from the rest of society, Coleman’s subjects so resembled one other that being a teenager outweighed differences in race, income, or geography. The culture that teenagers built revolved around trivial concerns, he asserted, driven by peer pressure and minute attention to the judgment of others. These other-directed personalities in training were consumers par excellence, interested only in making the proper impression at sporting events and dances. Much to Coleman’s dismay, they cared little for academic success and relegated scholars to social marginality. Even when not openly delinquent, teen culture in Coleman’s view was incompatible with preparation for adulthood or contribution to the community.<sup>54</sup>

As sociologist Bennett Berger argued in an incisive 1963 review of Coleman’s work, much of the criticism of teenagers exaggerated their separate and “countercultural” way of life. Coleman missed a number of similarities between the teenagers that he studied and their parents. A majority of parents probably did not look at high school as solely, or even primarily, an academic venture. Teenagers’ interest in cars, clothes, the opposite sex, and sports followed adults’ interest in those very same things. Berger pointed out that football, which Coleman dismissed as anti-intellectual and retrograde, served as a catalyst for community building, something academic achievement was too individualized and specialized to accomplish. Tales of juvenile delinquency and rock ‘n’ roll–fueled rebellion notwithstanding, American teenagers were attentive to their parents’ judgments. A majority of Coleman’s respondents indicated that they preferred the parent-approved Pat Boone over Elvis Presley by a wide margin and claimed that they would rather risk breaking with a friend than earning their parents’ disapproval.<sup>55</sup>

Erikson’s account of identity soon became an inspiration for criticism not simply of the state of adolescence but also of the culture to which adolescences were expected to adapt. The critics whose indictments appeared in the late 1950s and early 1960s wrote with considerably more sympathy for the dilemmas of teenagers than Farnham or Coleman and were less committed to a version of the self anchored in prevailing values. The work of the professor of education Edgar Z. Friedenberg, the anarchist-Gestalt therapist Paul Goodman, and the cultural anthropologist Jules Henry opened a new chapter in writing about the American teenager. For these writers, the troubled experience of adolescence revealed the failures of American society

to provide viable pathways to meaningful love and work. Their criticism of postwar adolescence was part of a larger criticism of the impoverished possibilities of self.<sup>56</sup>

Of the three, Friedenberg drew most directly on Erikson. He deplored that American adolescence had ceased to be a period of experimentation and true counterculture and had instead been contaminated by adult insistence that activities have socially acceptable ends. Unlike simple societies and lower-class subcultures, Friedenberg argued, intricate social organizations require an extended testing process so people develop a repertoire of responses to multifaceted expectations. A stable ego identity only develops when one sets oneself against the social order and becomes aware of “the complex, subtle, and precious difference between himself and his environment.”<sup>57</sup> Friedenberg controversially advocated freedom for teenagers to act as if they were young aristocrats, praising English boarding schools for providing an arena where they could cultivate confidence and a sense of self-assurance. Where the English permitted “adolescents something to be adolescent about,” American children, on the other hand, were provided experiences with the appearance of adulthood but none of the difficulties or unpleasantness. Friedenberg criticized teachers, parents, and those in the helping professions for suppressing all disagreements as unproductive and encouraging the bland other-directedness of superficial agreement. The “go along to get along” spirit, Friedenberg argued, robbed American teenagers of meaningful opportunities to achieve authentic self-understanding.

Where Friedenberg saw adult control in service of group calm, Goodman and Henry recognized adult control in American high schools, apprentice programs, and even much recreation as preparation for the regimented work of adulthood—what Goodman called “the organized system.”<sup>58</sup> Goodman maintained that the organized system did not want boys to grow into men because men “did not suit.” They were too likely to question and to demand meaning, something that ran counter to the rote and discipline necessary for the jobs for which most teenagers were preparing. Unlike Friedenberg, Goodman traced the problem of youth to the lack of meaningful connection to social life as a whole. Adolescence in general and the school in particular was an exercise in creating rigid boundaries and policing impulse. Limited and channeled American youth in Goodman’s view were denied the chance to mold their world to their liking. “Growing up absurd” meant maturing into political passivity and routinized, meaningless work in factories and offices. For Goodman, simply rejecting the American way of growing up was insufficient. The Beats earned his disapproval for their resignation and,

while understanding of delinquents' response, he nonetheless found them too fatalistic for his liking.

Based on his observation of St. Louis area high schools, Henry viewed the discipline to which adolescents were subject as counterproductive, virtually guaranteed to coax the very responses that it ostensibly rejected. In contrast to Coleman, Henry regarded school work as unchallenging and meaningless. Studying, especially when nagged to do so by parents, made Henry's informants feel powerless, at the mercy of others. Promise of vague future benefits from school work only compounded the feeling. Yet because adolescents neither developed their own standards of success nor were schooled in institutions that encouraged their talents or aspirations, grades loomed large in their education and work life. Grading met no needs, Henry claimed, but it did accustom students to accept impersonal, standardized norms as the best metric of self-worth. For the majority, this too was a recipe for feelings of inadequacy. When one added the example of "hard-working daddies" who are "little at home and burdened with the irritations, coronaries, and ulcers of their work," it was hardly surprising to Henry that American teenagers were "id creatures." Yet even here Henry discerned a training for future life and an "adaptive radiation" of the self. Advertising and consumerism depended on the decontrol of restraint and the celebration of Id values.<sup>59</sup>

Both Goodman and Freidenberg treated boys as the norm. They made virtually no mention of girls' problems or their futures. Women, Goodman insisted in the introduction to his book, did not grow up absurd since they "will have children which is absolutely self-justifying, like any other natural or creative act." He went on: the problems of teenage boys were "intensely interesting to women, for if the boys do not grow up to be men, where shall the women find men?"<sup>60</sup> Henry, on the other hand, took girls' problems seriously, noting the degree to which they also experienced anxiety. Few analysts captured the silent terror and constant confusion of adolescence as adeptly as Henry. In addition to the psychological problems inherent in the conflict between biology and parental demand, Henry gauged the effects on adolescents of the constant mobility of American life. Meaningful friendships, he argued, would have enabled sublimation. Lacking that stability, teenagers feel inadequate on the prom dance floor and in automobile backseats. Parental shortcomings lay less in the absence of discipline than in failure to model meaningful lives for their children. This inability of adults to provide ego ideals, Henry argued, created a void that peers filled. Girls were especially affected in adolescence. The difficulty lay not so much in limited goals—since beauty, fashion, and popularity struck him as legitimate and meaningful

pursuits—as in parental goading of girls into sexual competition to snare the right husband and condemnation of those who refused to compete.<sup>61</sup>

Accompanying the recognition of adolescence as a stage of life was a new form of coming-of-age expressive culture. Although it shared with earlier stories the conventions of a confused and unsettled protagonist and a distant and seemingly implacable social order, mid-twentieth-century fiction departed from the classic *bildungsroman* and *kunsterroman*, which were novels of formation and growth of self. Narrated in the third person, connoting the objective truth of the situation, classic youth novels ended with the protagonists wiser and more understanding than when they began, their skills in negotiating the variability of life enhanced. Beginning their journey set against a society that seemingly had no place for them, they usually ended with a better sense of where they fit in and who they were. Their hard-won maturity enabled them to avoid repeating the mistakes of youth. Of the portrayal of adolescent crisis that were popular among subsequent generations (or at least teachers of subsequent generations), perhaps only John Knowles's *Separate Peace* (1959) harkened back to nineteenth-century traditions of character formation.

By contrast, most postwar depictions of youthful protagonists refused to conjure up a viable or attractive version of maturity. Written in the first person or shot with a subjective camera, midcentury novels and films were statements of the feelings, perceptions, and tentative intuitions of narrators with little sense of direction. As titles such as *On the Road* and *Rabbit Run* indicate, postwar novels and films emphasized movement, not arrival. Their protagonists lack meaningful models and meaningful goals. Even those characters whose lives are not particularly angst ridden, like the protagonist of Saul Bellow's picaresque novel *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), lack a sense of purpose and commitment. March's tale takes him from one thing to another, from Chicago poolrooms and Mexican deserts to service in the Merchant Marine and a sketchy postwar European business career. March is optimistic rather than morose. He imagines himself a "sort of Columbus," having before him an "immediate terra incognita that spreads out in every gaze." Yet like other adolescent protagonists at midcentury, he has no overarching goals, deeply held commitments, or truly stable or affectionate relationships with others.

A strong streak of conservatism ran through many teen movies of the period, most notably in Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), which depicts twenty-four hours in the life of troubled teenager Jim Stark. Known for James Dean's star turn in which he combined daring, anger, pain, and an

expressive adolescent inarticulateness, the movie often seemed like Farnham in Technicolor. Jim's parents never make him face the consequences of his behavior, moving to a new school every time he has a brush with the law or fails to make friends. Much to his disgust, his parents try to dissuade him from taking responsibility for the death of a rival during a "chickie run," a race in two stolen cars toward a cliff that is won by being the last to jump out. At the heart of Jim's teen angst is the gender trouble all around him. His cold and demanding mother clearly dominates his father, who backs down in nearly every argument rather than live with unpleasantness. His father (Jim Backus) is so clearly emasculated that he wears an apron over his suit while doing household chores (a warning sign in a period committed to an unequivocal sexual division of roles, which Ray emphasized by making it a particularly frilly, full-length one). He does not, and apparently cannot, answer Jim's constant question about what one has to do to be a man. The lack of guidance drives Jim to complain that his father just wants to be his pal and to hope his dad would haul off and hit his mother just once and set things straight. Howling after being arrested for public drunkenness that his parents are tearing him apart, he concludes that no one could grow up in such a circus. He is not the only teen who has parents who fail to fulfill their proper gender roles. The father of Judy (Natalie Wood) rebuffs her efforts at affection, and the father of Plato (Sal Mineo) has abandoned him entirely. Damaged and marooned, the three end in a deserted mansion where they fantasize themselves a family with quite traditional roles. After tragedy strikes with the shooting of Plato, Jim's dad vows to be a better father, restoring the family to its proper patriarchal form and launching Jim toward maturity.

The strange allure of permanent adolescence was part of the long-standing appeal of J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951). The protagonist Holden Caulfield's judgmental nature, emotional volatility, and inability to form meaningful connections exemplify the traits that made teenagers fascinating and exasperating. Stung by his brother Allie's death, Holden is deeply uncomfortable with himself and finds it hard to build a genuine identity. He is a bundle of contradictions, railing against hypocrisy yet constantly lying, sometimes quite cruelly. Adulthood by its very nature disturbs and repels him. By his lights, grownups are "phonies" who act inauthentically or exhibit bad taste. Theirs in short is a world of artifice and manipulation. To escape it, Holden imagines going west and living as a deaf mute. His repulsion extends to sexuality, which he regards as an unwarranted aggression on the innocence of childhood. He takes as his calling protecting that innocence in the guise of the catcher in the rye who prevents playing children from falling off the edge of a cliff. Angered by the kids who scratch obscenities in the

merry-go-round, he lacks the ego ideals that come with successful resolution of the Eriksonian conflict between identity and role, envying the stasis of the Inuits in the diorama at the Natural History museum.<sup>62</sup>

Some critics have touted Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar* (1963) as the female version of *Catcher*, and the similarities are clear. Plath's protagonist, Esther Greenwood, shares with Holden Caulfield a profound alienation from the adult world and from herself. Like him, she judges others as inauthentic and has no sense of what she wants to be. Plath's novel is unique in its specific particular exploration of the female social world Esther inhabits and the pain that world generates in her. Winner of a prestigious summer internship at a New York woman's magazine, *Ladies Day*, Esther is unmoved by what other girls would have regarded as a dream chance, feeling only "still and empty" (2). Unlike her fellow interns, she rejects traditional goals. When asked what she wants to be, she can only reply that she doesn't know. Conventional female roles repel her. She compares marriage and children rearing to being "brainwashed": "you went about numb as a slave in some private totalitarian state" (81). Childbirth is akin to being trapped in a "long, blind, doorless and windowless corridor of pain" (62). The double standard infuriates her. She labels her boyfriend Buddy a "hypocrite" when he admits he is not a virgin and breaks off their engagement. Losing her virginity to a tall but not very good-looking mathematician in Cambridge leads to hemorrhaging and a trip to the hospital. She regards the female existence as being under a bell jar—an image she uses to describe her own empty, airless, suspended experience but applies later to the college girls who play bridge, gossip, and study.

Esther finds comfort only in abnegation of self. Where Holden aspires to be isolated or in a perpetual adolescent state, Esther struggles simply to say "I am." Her loss of self becomes so severe that she feels a zombie inside her, preventing her from speaking or writing. Her suicide attempts fail because she is convinced that her body will not obey her mind. Analysis with an arrogant, self-absorbed male psychiatrist accelerates her efforts at self-annihilation, which almost succeed when she takes fifty sleeping pills at once in her cellar. Confined to a private hospital, she makes modest progress in treatment with an empathetic female doctor and is able to achieve a precarious grip on normality. At the funeral of a friend who successfully committed suicide, she does manage "I am, I am, I am," an utterance that she ascribes to "the old brag of my heart." Even as she recovers, she holds on to her memories of her madness, which allows her to keep her distance from long-standing social roles. The content of her character remains sketchy at best. It is by no means certain that she, like Plath herself, will not try suicide again.



Both *Bell Jar* and *Catcher* have remained popular among new generations of teenagers. In part that popularity owes something to teachers who continue to assign the once-banned books in hope of remaining relevant. That Baby Boomers have nostalgia for their adolescence suggests that youthful alienation has ironically become a badge of authenticity and a protector of identity against change and social expectations. That the liminal state of adolescence functions as a kind of ethnicity is testimony to the limits of postwar efforts to center the self.

# Collier's

15c

August 5, 1950



## HIROSHIMA, U.S.A.

*Can Anything Be Done About It?*

*"Hiroshima, U.S.A.": The August 5, 1950, issue of Collier's magazine featured an article speculating on the destruction of New York City amid a USA-USSR nuclear war. Despite the apparent public support for the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, an undercurrent of antiwar sentiment grew, and popular fears of a third world war persisted. Courtesy of Collier's Magazine, JTE Multimedia, LLC.*



John F. Kennedy in Berlin, June 1963: *Speaking to enormous crowds in West Berlin, Kennedy famously declared, "Ich bin ein Berliner," as he hailed the pro-American sector of the divided city as a bulwark of anticommunism and affirmed US leadership in the Cold War. Photo by Von der Becke/ullstein bild via Getty Images.*



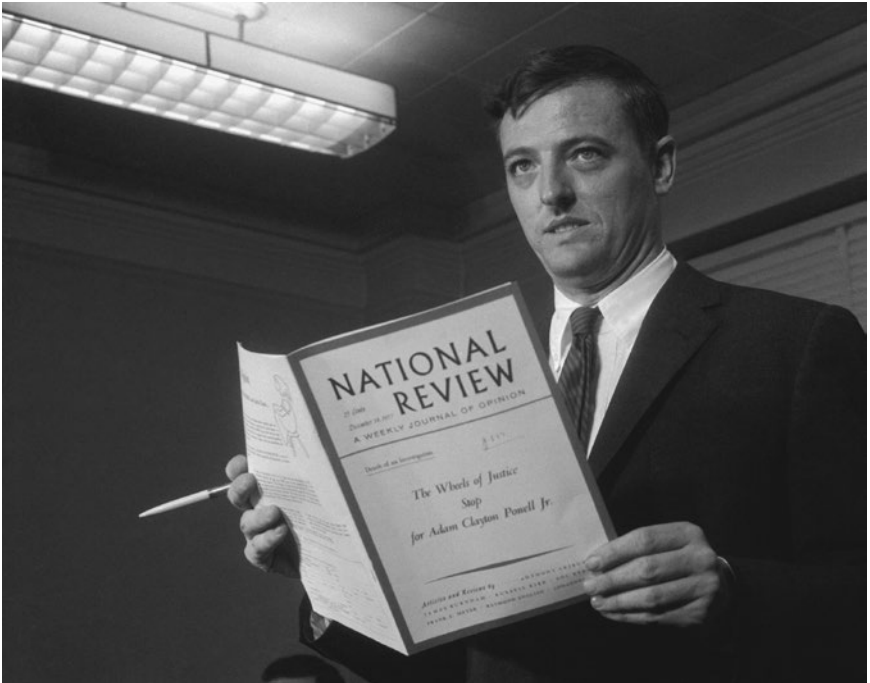
Scientists and Artists for Henry A. Wallace, 1948: Literary scholar F. O. Matthiessen, playwright Lillian Hellman (both on the right), and other leaders of the Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions gathered to support Henry A. Wallace's nomination as Progressive Party candidate for president. Assassinated for alleged Communist sympathies, Matthiessen committed suicide in early 1950. Photo by George Skadding/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images.



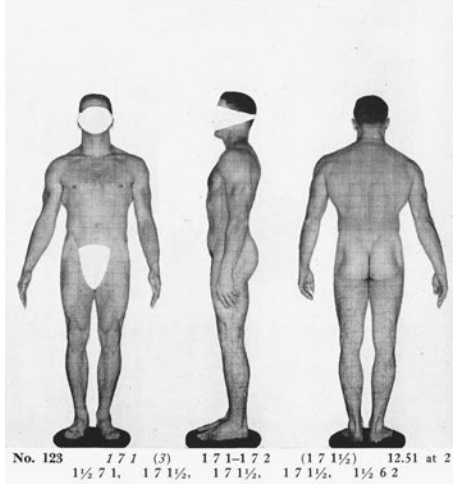
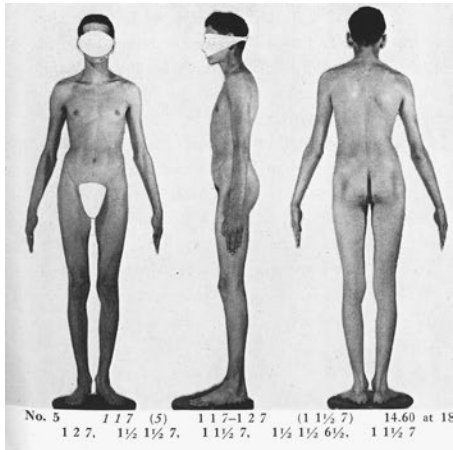
Gwendolyn Brooks and Langston Hughes, 1949: *Brooks and Hughes celebrated publication of The Poetry of the Negro, edited by Hughes and Arna Bontemps, at the Chicago Public Library's George Cleveland Hall Branch—a center of the "Chicago Renaissance" of black literature since the 1930s. Brooks's Annie Allen won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry the following year. George Cleveland Hall Branch Archives, Box 11, Folder 146, Vivian G. Harsh Collection, Chicago Public Library.*



Hannah Arendt, 1950: *The political philosopher Hannah Arendt, having fled Nazi Germany and then Vichy France, arrived in the United States in 1941. Her three-volume work, The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951), influentially developed the concept of "totalitarianism," identifying Nazism and Stalinism as uniquely modern manifestations of "radical evil."* Courtesy of the Hannah Arendt Bluecher Literary Trust.



William F. Buckley Jr., 1955, holding the first issue of his magazine, the National Review, kicked off the new conservative intellectual movement in the United States. Rooted in the virulently anticommunist wing of the Republican Party associated with Joseph McCarthy, National Review helped boost the Goldwater movement of the early 1960s. Bettman/Getty Images.



Somatotypes (left): Ectomorph (linear-top), mesomorph (muscular-middle), and endomorph (spherical-bottom) body types played a crucial role in psychologist William Sheldon's elaborate scheme (note codes below each type) to explain how body dictated the traits of the self. Sheldon celebrated the muscularity of the mesomorph for engendering a dynamic and well-integrated personality. From William H. Sheldon, *Atlas of Men: A Guide for Somatotyping the Adult Male at All Ages* (New York: Harper, 1954).

# EX-GI BECOMES BLONDE BEAUTY

*Operations Transform Bronx Youth*



Christine Jorgensen: Jorgensen's sexual reassignment surgery opened her to ridicule and discrimination and cast doubt on the assumption that biological endowment determined gender identity. Photo by NY Daily News via Getty Images.

TWENTY CENTS

SEPTEMBER 27, 1954

The cover of TIME magazine from September 27, 1954, features a large, detailed illustration of David Riesman in the foreground. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a suit, white shirt, and tie, and has a serious expression. He is wearing round-rimmed glasses. The background is a dark, textured field of small, identical human figures, suggesting a crowd or a society. In the upper left, two smaller figures are shown walking away from the viewer. The first figure is carrying a large satellite dish on his back and pointing towards the right. The second figure is carrying a globe on his back. The word "TIME" is printed in large, bold, serif letters across the top, with "WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE" written below it. The price "TWENTY CENTS" is in the top left corner, and the date "SEPTEMBER 27, 1954" is in the top right corner. At the bottom left, it says "SOCIAL SCIENTIST DAVID RIESMAN" and "What is the American character?". At the bottom right, there is a signature "Ernest Hamilton Baker...".

TIME  
WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE

SOCIAL SCIENTIST DAVID RIESMAN  
What is the American character?

Ernest Hamilton Baker...

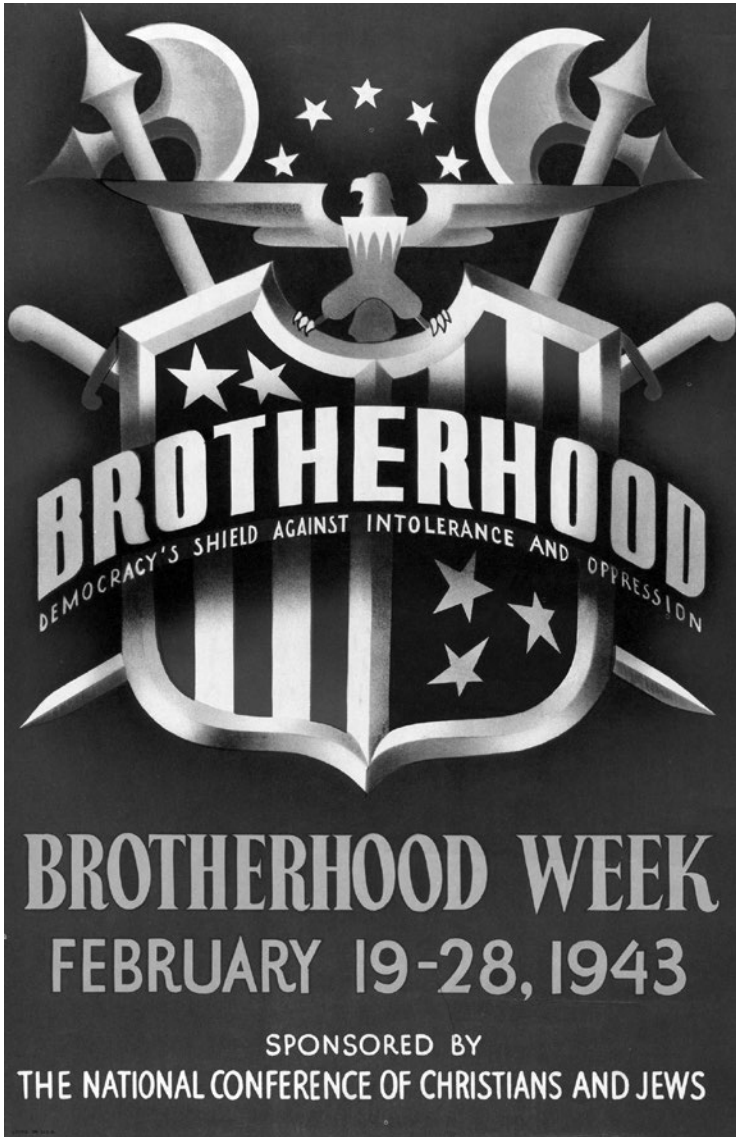
\$6.00 A YEAR (REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.) VOL. LXIV NO. 13

David Riesman: *Riesman's Lonely Crowd* argued that the typical personality type of modern life took cues from others rather than relied on inner character. This shift led many critics to fear a society of conformists and blind followers. From TIME. © 1954 TIME USA LLC. All rights reserved. Used under license. TIME and TIME USA LLC. are not affiliated with, and do not endorse products or services of, Rowman & Littlefield.





George Tooker, *The Subway* (1950): Tooker's art emphasized the alienation and loneliness of mass society. For him the subway was especially noteworthy for its "denial of the senses and a negation of life itself." © Estate of George Tooker. Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York.



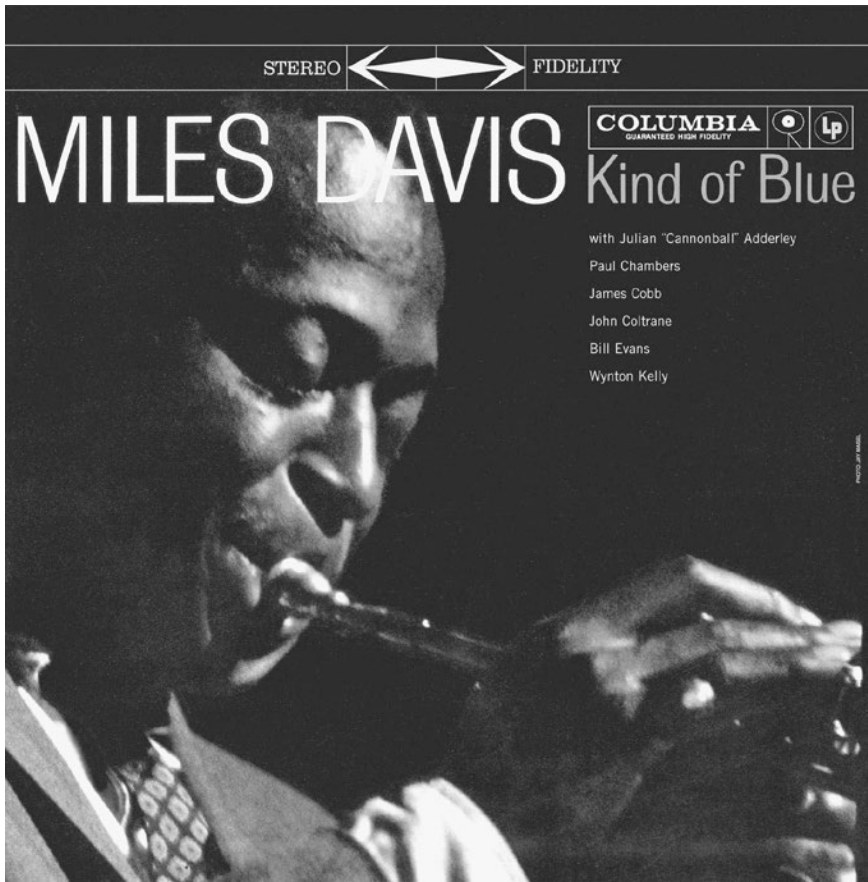
National Brotherhood Week: *The brainchild of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the Week was intended to commemorate the nation's ideals of toleration. For some, like sociologist Will Herberg, rapprochement between Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism coincided with the loss of spiritual rigor.* Image courtesy of the World War Poster collection (Mss036), Literary Manuscripts Collection, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis.



Lorraine Hansberry, 1960: *Playwright* (*A Raisin in the Sun*), *critic* (*Young, Gifted and Black*), *lesbian feminist*, Hansberry was one of the black intellectuals who defended the particularities of black culture against a homogenizing universalism championed by many white liberals. Photo by Afro American Newspapers/Gado/Getty Images.



Phyllis Lyon (left) and Del Martin: *Long-time lovers, Lyon and Martin founded the Daughters of Bilitis to facilitate the integration of lesbians into American life. To that end, they initially urged members to tone down “outlandish” and non-normative behavior and dress, a strategy the organization abandoned in the early 1960s. Courtesy JEB Productions.*



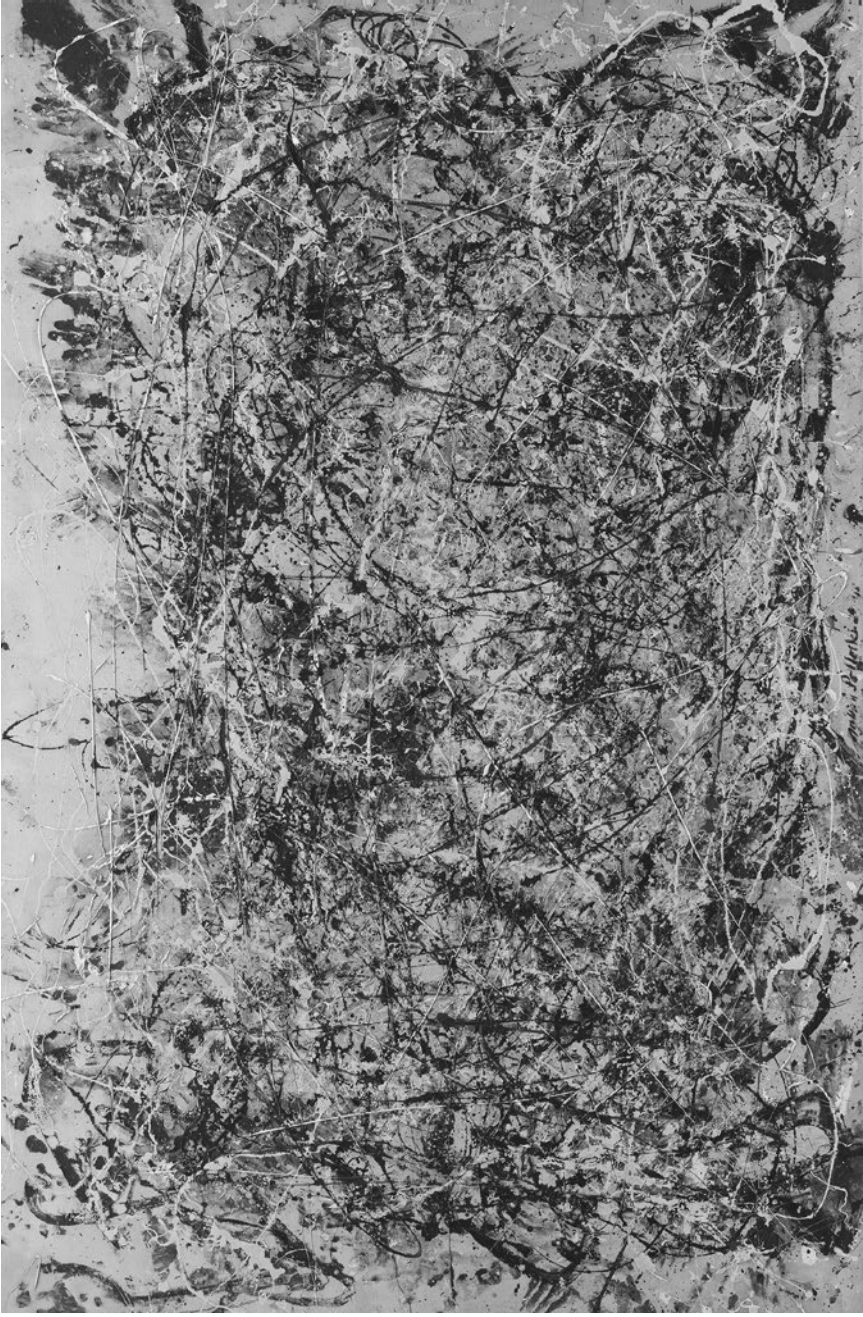
Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue*: Trumpeter and bandleader Miles Davis's 1959 pathbreaking album that redefined the direction of jazz by drawing upon the Lydian mode, which emphasized scales rather than chords as building blocks. The change allowed for more dashing runs and greater variations. © Jay Maisel.



Little Richard, 1956: *His boogie-woogie piano was an important contribution to the musical vocabulary of rock 'n' roll. His flamboyant demeanor both defused white fears of black sexuality and provided a template for later acts.* Photo by Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images.



Sock Hop, 1954: *Many adults regarded the teenagers of mid-century as living in a world apart, prompting worries that they would fail to mature to meet future challenges. A cottage industry of empirical investigation of, and psychological speculation about, adolescents was a hallmark of postwar America.* Photo by Nina Leen/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images.



Jackson Pollock, *Number 1, 1948* (1948). Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.



*"In the painting": Hans Namuth's portraits of Jackson Pollock at work in 1950 captured the artist's physicality and novel approach, likely inspiring Harold Rosenberg's essay on "Action Painting." The photographs of Pollock in motion captivated dancers, performance artists, and creators of "Happenings" who believed he had dissolved the boundaries between genres, and between art and "life." Courtesy Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. © 1991 Hans Namuth Estate.*





*"Go! Go! Go!": Allen Ginsberg reading *Howl* in San Francisco, 1955. A leading member of the Beat writers, Ginsberg shared a performative aesthetic with other postwar American poets whose readings mimicked jazz improvisation. Despairing of the fate of "the best minds of my generation," Ginsberg delivered a vigorous rhythmic performance with the audience cheering him on. Special Collections & Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.*



Josef Albers teaching at Black Mountain College, mid-1940s. *One of many refugee German modernists who fled the Nazi regime, Albers joined the faculty of the experimental college in North Carolina in 1933 and taught a version of the introductory course he had given at the Bauhaus. Albers was an austere formalist, but he believed art was an ethical discipline that heightened critical awareness of one's social situation.* Photo by Genevieve Naylor/Corbis via Getty Images.



*"Inside and outside are connected": A student of Albers at Black Mountain, Ruth Asawa began in the late 1940s to create bulbous wire sculptures after watching Mexican women weave baskets from a single loop of wire. Her delicate hanging pieces epitomized the new modernists' relational aesthetic, drawing the viewer's attention "inside and outside" the work to the world beyond. © Imogen Cunningham Trust.*



*"The subject of dance is dancing itself": Dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham came to Black Mountain with his partner John Cage in the summer of 1948 and returned in 1952 and 1953. Cunningham broke with the mythic narratives of Martha Graham's productions and danced in a seemingly improvisational style. He and Cage collaborated on parallel but independent pieces joined only by time durations. Courtesy of the Estate of Hazel Larsen Archer and the Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center.*



D.T. Suzuki and John Cage, 1962: *Inspired by the lectures of Japanese scholar D. T. Suzuki at Columbia, John Cage introduced Zen concepts into the American avant-garde community. Suzuki's idea of satori—of a moment of enlightenment that opens up an attentive experience of the universe—was likely an impetus to Cage's 1952 "silent piece," 4'33".* Photographer: Yasuhiro Yoshioka. Courtesy of the John Cage Trust.



Judith Malina and Paul Goodman, 1956: *Malina and her husband Julian Beck launched the Living Theatre in 1948 and began staging productions dealing with homosexuality, drug use, and other transgressive themes. Malina's friend Paul Goodman authored many of their plays; his anarchism animated their vision of the Living Theatre as a radical community uniting New York's artistic and political avant-gardes.* Photo by Weegee (Arthur Fellig)/International Centre of Photography/Getty Images.



Louis Kahn, Salk Institute for Biological Studies, La Jolla, California (1959–1965): *In contrast to the glass-and-steel towers of “International Style” architecture, Kahn deployed concrete, brick, wood, and natural light in monumental buildings meant to foster communal identity and a sense of place. The narrow channel of water at the center of the institute’s courtyard aligns with the setting sun at the spring and fall equinoxes. Photograph by Elizabeth Daniels.*



“Happenings”: Allan Kaprow eulogized Jackson Pollock as the artist who “destroyed painting” and freed artists to engage with everyday urban life. Beginning with his 1959 piece *18 Happenings in Six Parts*, Kaprow staged participatory works enlisting artists and audiences in multiple, simultaneous activities. His 1962 *Words* confronted visitors with graffiti and commercial language, accompanied by recorded music, lectures, and nonsense talk played on three record players. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (980063).



LeRoi Jones in New York City, 1964: Jones (Amiri Baraka after 1965) was a poet, literary editor, and playwright associated with the Beats and other avant-garde currents from the late 1950s. His 1963 book *Blues People* argued that blues and jazz had roots in African traditions transmuted by the black experience of slavery, Jim Crow, and the Great Migration. Photo by Fred W. McDarrah/Getty Images.

## CHAPTER FIVE



# American Inclusion and Its Discontents

Few, if any, photographic exhibitions have achieved the popularity of the Museum of Modern Art's 1955 venture, *Family of Man*. Curated by famed photographer Edward Steichen, the undertaking consisted of 503 distinct images taken in sixty-eight countries by 273 different photographers. After its New York debut, the show spent the next eight years touring the world, stopping in thirty-seven nations before being permanently installed at Common Market headquarters in Steichen's native Luxembourg. In toto, nine million people saw some version of the exhibit. A book version, which is still in print, has sold four million copies. As the title suggests, Steichen hoped the exhibit would convey the underlying and deep connections among the peoples of the world. To that end, he grouped the images by activities and conditions common to all—birth, work, play, courtship, marriage, death—rather than by country of origin. The panels of text that accompanied the images, written by Steichen's brother-in-law, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Carl Sandburg, announced that there “is only one man in the world and his name is All Men. There is only one woman in the world and her name is All Women.” Humanity was, Sandburg maintained, “one big family hugging close to the ball of Earth for its life and being.” Capping the exhibit was a photograph of the mushroom cloud, a vivid reminder that nuclear weapons constituted a common threat to the whole of humanity. Echoing the endorsement of underlying commonality, photographer Barbara Morgan praised the exhibition for its ability to have American viewers look at a polygamist family and feel an intrinsic kinship.<sup>1</sup>



Not everyone applauded the exhibition or approved of its ideological position. Writing in 1958, famed photographer Walker Evans criticized its treacly sentimentality (“bogus heartfelt”), which resulted from its false universalism (“human familyhood”). Evans’s condemnation echoed one that the French critic Roland Barthes leveled a year earlier but which did not appear in English until 1970. Barthes criticized the *Family of Man* as a mythology, an ideological maneuver that aspired to naturalize history, robbing it of its particularity and its true diversity by postulating a magic transformation in which a surface pluralism gives way to a common mold in which “man is born, works, laughs and dies everywhere in the same way.” Citing the fate of Emmett Till, the black Chicago teenager brutally murdered in Mississippi for ostensibly leering at a white woman, Barthes contended that fellow feeling rarely, if ever, canceled awareness of group differences.<sup>2</sup>

Steichen’s exhibition was just one of many cultural artifacts that emphasized social inclusion and solidarity. Observers rightly noted the growing talk of acceptance of those previously excluded and marginalized. Films about World War II often mirrored *The Family of Man* in their depiction of diverse military units whose members learn that acceptance of one another was the American way. It was that sentiment, so contrary to long-standing complaints about the United States becoming a polyglot boardinghouse, that led the editors of *Fortune* magazine to assert somewhat blithely that “the presence . . . of a bewildering number of races and national origins, creeds and shibboleths, economic interests and explosive ideas is to him [the American] no problem at all. On the contrary it is a great asset.”<sup>3</sup>

Inclusiveness as value and fact constituted a prime characteristic of academic discourse, as well. Numerous political scientists rejected theories of political power as flowing from a ruling elite for one that stressed its dispersal among competing, often newly organized and empowered interest groups. For their part, sociologists asserted that racial segregation ran afoul of the democratic creed at the heart of national identity and that failure to live by that creed led to social disturbance. Historians sought a key to national genius in immigration and assimilation.<sup>4</sup> In highlighting American diversity and inclusion, American social science implicitly contrasted the variety and acceptance supposedly inherent in American social life with the gray and somber uniformity of totalitarian societies and bolstered Cold War-era appeals to decolonizing the world.<sup>5</sup>

Those who discerned an inclusionary spirit and wide dispersal of power conceded the phenomena were often more aspirational than descriptive. Few denied that exclusion, hierarchy, and domination were common occurrences in postwar American life, but many observers recognized enough

signs of change to anticipate that inclusion and broad participation were becoming more than empty ideals. Although the 1960s have a reputation as the high tide of postwar reform, the immediate postwar period witnessed, among other noteworthy developments, an increase in college matriculation from families that had never had a member attend, the greater availability of luxury goods, a growing acceptance of Jews and Catholics as legitimate and coequal participants in American society, the endorsement of full citizenship rights for people of color by the Democratic Party in the North and the Supreme Court (two institutions that had vehemently opposed that goal in the nineteenth century), a dawning perception that domesticity and passivity constituted unproductive constraints on women, and even a stirring of homosexual rights organizations in coastal cities and, in such fields as music and art, tolerance of gays and lesbians. The assumption that social inclusivity was increasing provided the foundation for Howard Becker's classic study *Outsiders* (1963), which argued that deviants were not inherently marginal or ill suited for social life but were men and women who chose to reject social rules. Their deviance was a matter of attitude rather than birth or necessity.<sup>6</sup>

Much exclusion was not self-chosen but followed long-standing proclivities. The point was driven home in the call and response of "America" in the classic film musical *West Side Story* (1961 from the 1957 Broadway musical). Although its lyrics were written by a white man, Stephen Sondheim, the song, sung by the Puerto Rican teenagers of the West Side of New York, exposes the contrast between the promise of assimilation and the reality of rejection and marginalization. Throughout the number, the appeal of the nation's material wealth is set against the realities of exclusion. "Life can be bright in America," sings one side. (In the film, the division is gendered, with the women celebrating America's possibilities, the men emphasizing its failures.) Only to be answered with "if you're all white in America."

Those who could not easily hide their differences from the white and male gatekeepers consistently faced resistance on the grounds that their biological and psychological makeup prevented their full participation. The continued restriction in the face of the promise of inclusion prompted significant mobilization to achieve full-fledged entrance into the mainstream. Activists insisted that they shared a common humanity that qualified them for social, cultural, and political inclusion. Yet the excruciatingly slow pace of change led a small but incisive minority of the excluded to reconsider the terms of inclusion. Rather than claim racial minorities and women were essentially no different from whites and men, they insisted that they possessed unique qualities that deserved recognition as crucial components of the truly "human" and were therefore worthy of respect rather than derision. Such a goal

was, nonetheless, extraordinarily difficult to realize. American music was no exception, riven as it was by cultural appropriations and racist business practices, but at rare moments as when Bill Evans sat down with Miles Davis, one might envision legitimate boundary crossings.

### The Ambiguities of Belonging

After the war, observers of industrial life frequently concluded that the working class had sufficiently matured to be a responsible partner in securing economic growth. The judgment was particularly surprising given the strike wave of 1945–1946 in which nearly five million workers left the job. The wave struck such core industrial sectors as rails, steel, coal, oil, meat packing, and automobiles and even resulted in general strikes in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; Rochester, New York; and Oakland, California. The strikes in turn prompted condemnations from middle-class consumers and editorial boards across the country for allegedly interfering with postwar reconversion. Angered voters returned a Republican Congress, which passed the Taft-Hartley Act (1947) over President Truman's veto. The act limited the power of organized labor by outlawing the closed shop, allowing states to pass so-called right-to-work laws that prohibited contracts making union membership a condition of employment, and requiring unions to give eighty days' notice of intention to strike. The labor strife of the late 1940s proved to be the last gasp of the previous era's union militancy, rather than a foreshadowing of continued postwar conflict.

Vestiges of the heated rhetoric of the 1930s remained, as in unions' condemnation of Taft-Hartley as a "slave labor law" and conservative Arizona senator Barry Goldwater's claim that United Auto Workers president Walter Reuther constituted a greater threat to freedom than *Sputnik*. But many postwar commentators were more impressed that labor and management had come to see how large profits and high wages were interdependent. By 1951, *Fortune* magazine could praise unions for putting aside class-based thinking that made business the "ENEMY" and instead viewing management as the "opposing team in a rough and competitive game." Unions had become, the editors assured readers, the "tool for gaining and keeping as an individual the status and security of a full citizen in a capitalist society," thereby making "the worker to an amazing degree a middle-class member of a middle-class society." *Fortune* did concede that unions were still capable of "group greed," at times ignoring the public good such as when they insisted that members whose jobs were technologically obsolete continue to be paid. Labor spokespeople also applauded the end of class enmity. Congress of Industrial Organi-

zations president Philip Murray told the organization's 1948 convention that "the interests of farmers, factory hands, business and professional people, and white-collar toilers prove to be the same."<sup>7</sup>

Both *Fortune* and Murray pinned their argument about the concert of interests on the unprecedented expansion of consumption in the postwar period. Sustained profits and rising wages in the core sectors enabled an increasing number of workers to purchase discretionary items. Many working-class families bought for the first time such goods as nylons, automobiles, vacations, and college educations, leading some commentators to talk about the growing democratization of social life. By the end of the period, air conditioners, washing machines, frozen foods, and television sets were less luxuries than part of the socially required basket of goods. Making the national spending spree possible was the liberal dispensation of credit. "Buy now, pay later" became a basic phrase in the American language. The Chamber of Commerce took the new consumerism as demonstration that the United States had developed a new, democratic form of capitalism. "U.S. capitalism is *popular* capitalism, not only in the sense that it has popular support, but in the deeper sense that the people as a whole participate in it and use it," crowed *Fortune*.<sup>8</sup>

As postwar unions ceded control of the shop floor in exchange for long-term contracts that allowed members to maintain the new standard of living, scholars such as Princeton labor economist Richard A. Lester argued that the rank-and-file tended to identify as consumers rather than workers. Taking their cues from the attitudinal change of their "constituents," labor organizations became experts in bargaining, eager to further the narrowing of "differences between manual and white-collar workers." Lester argued that such "maturity" accounted for the greater middle-class acceptance of unions, which in turned encouraged workers to favor accumulation and individual advancement over solidarity.<sup>9</sup> There was a companion literature that argued business had toned down its implacable opposition to organized labor and jettisoned the unfettered pursuit of profit. According to management expert Peter Drucker, the corporation had also matured, envisioning its function as serving customers rather than concentrating solely on augmenting gains. Service capitalism was especially respectful of workers, perhaps because those who worked with things were allegedly being replaced by those who labored in knowledge. Drucker's critics have regarded his work as unduly optimistic, especially in light of the steadfast opposition of corporate leaders like General Electric's Lemuel Boulware, who was determined to undermine the authority of labor union leadership with a take-it-or-leave-it stance at every negotiation.<sup>10</sup>

Political scientists also assumed class was a less salient factor in political behavior. Robert Dahl's pluralist theory of "polyarchal democracy," an explicit challenge to both class analysis and C. Wright Mills's notion of a ruling elite, envisioned American politics as a clash between various interest groups rooted in descent, occupation, religion, and race. Dahl argued that no one of these was dominant in every instance: the most successful politicians put together coalitions of groups that did not necessarily agree on more than a single issue. This was true both locally, as he contended in his empirical study of New Haven, and nationally.<sup>11</sup> Dahl's pluralism, with its multiple focal points of power, would at first inspection seem far from a "centered" discourse. On the surface, Dahl wrote, the system "has so little order and so much chaos," which nonetheless provided "a high probability that any active and legitimate group will make itself heard effectively at some stage in the process of decision." What was centered in Dahl's conception of politics was the dependence of polyarchal democracy on a social consensus. Dahl posited that the system of constant contentions and compromises flourished because interest groups generally agreed on the legitimacy of other actors and on the permissible goals and means of political actions. Beneath a political system that tended toward "reinforcing agreement, encouraging moderation, and maintaining social peace in a restless and immoderate people operating in a gigantic, powerful, diversified, and incredibly complex society" was a social life with effective mechanisms of inclusion rooted in assent and concurrence.<sup>12</sup>

Workers in core sectors may have consumed goods previously unavailable to them, but maintaining the new standard of living had unintended consequences. As social commentator David Riesman pointed out in his introduction to Eli Chinoy's classic study of Lansing, Michigan, autoworkers, many workers were "victimized by the growing prestige of consumer goods," convinced that the "care and feeding of products" was the "mainstay of life."<sup>13</sup> On reflection, Chinoy found, workers often saw consumption as a trap that prevented their advancement. Chinoy cited one worker who regarded the purchase of a car as his downfall because it chained him to the factory to make payments. Still another believed he might have been somebody if only he had put his mind to it and "not worshipped the almighty dollar." Chinoy concluded that autoworkers believed they had to make a choice between occupational advancement and acquisition of material possessions. When accumulation of goods proved emotionally unsatisfying, they blamed themselves rather than existing economic arrangements for their failure to advance. Faced with their own lack of mobility, autoworkers put special emphasis on that of their children.<sup>14</sup>

Opting for enhanced consumption, Chinoy maintained, was compensation for the drudgery and alienation of the assembly line. That argument resonated with Harvey Swados's own experience of working-class life. Born in Buffalo, New York, in 1920, Swados affiliated with the anti-Stalinist Workers' Party. During the war, he toiled in factories before joining the navy. Following the Armistice, he worked in marketing and public relations while writing fiction. Returning from the South of France in 1956, he opted for factory work at the Ford plant in Mawah, New Jersey, to support his family rather than return to marketing. Given that his intellectual friends offered him condolences when he told them of his decision, Swados doubted that workers had been fully incorporated into the American mainstream, or that social classes were converging in any meaningful way. He maintained in his trenchant essay "The Myth of the Happy Worker" that workers and their bosses had different life chances, assets, and beliefs. The vaunted enhanced consumption, even among relatively high-paid auto workers, depended upon working overtime, second jobs and other family labor, and taking on larger debt loads.<sup>15</sup>

Rejecting the congratulatory huzzahs about workers becoming middle class, Swados saw how profoundly their alienation distinguished their experience on the job from that of managers and bosses. Swados acknowledged that workers desired consumer goods but insisted that the meaning they ascribed to accumulation and the function it served in their lives differed from middle-class norms. Workers' lives were fraught with insecurities not just about their status but also their work. Anointing the higher standard of living, the unifying element of American life obscured the crucial difference in achieving that standard through physical exertion in noisy and dangerous places rather than in clean and safe locales. Swados insisted that "there is one thing that the worker doesn't do like the middle class: he works like a worker," and his attitude toward his work "is generally compounded of hatred, shame and resignation" (237). In his gripping collection of short stories about auto work and workers, *On the Line*, he dramatized the frustrations and disappointments in working on the line as well as the dangers and dehumanizing regimentation. The stories highlight the ambiguity with which workers regard the automobile—an appealing consumer item that offered the possibilities of freedom of movement while also chaining the worker in debt or even ending life on the factory floor or on the nation's highways.

White ethnics were to many observers the great success story of postwar inclusion. Once considered so unassimilable that Anglo-Americans excluded them from "white" status, descendants of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe had by the 1950s become full-fledged Americans in the eyes

of most native-born citizens. The complexions, customs, religion, and language that had supposedly disqualified them no longer mattered, especially as the second and third generations adopted mainstream ways. Surveys indicated larger numbers of Americans spoke English as their first tongue than before the war. As historian Thomas Archdeacon has noted, the economic gap separating white ethnic nationalities from natives and from each other narrowed substantially. Many in the second and third generations left enclaves and moved to more mixed neighborhoods. The result was a change in their identity. As John Higham noted, those who hailed from Poland went from being Poles in America to Polish Americans to American of Polish descent or derivation.<sup>16</sup> By the same token, nativism declined precipitously. Even the link between radicalism and national origin had loosened. Anticommunists continued to decry communism as an un-American creed advanced by foreigners, yet the author of the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, which prohibited the entrance of “subversives,” was careful to indicate that immigrants as a whole were not a threat, and that many had been essential to American greatness. For his part, Joseph McCarthy was not particularly anti-Semitic.<sup>17</sup> This integration was one reason by the 1950s the term *race*, which once was applied to Slavs or Hebrews, was reserved for nonwhites.<sup>18</sup>

Postwar assimilation contrasted with the cultural pluralism that Horace Kallen had endorsed at the beginning of the century. Kallen had understood immigrant groups as pieces in a mosaic with each group more or less retaining its essential character. Americans would share a public culture, but large swathes of life would be lived in ethnic enclaves. Writing in 1964, sociologist Milton Gordon contended that the nation had replaced the ancestral group as the source of the customs, values, and behaviors with which most white Americans identified. Marriage and place of residence ceased to be predominantly ethnic, although people tended to marry and live among those who shared their religious and class identifications—choices that hastened the loss of ethnic identification.<sup>19</sup>

Gordon built on the concept of the triple melting pot that Will Herberg introduced in his *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (1955), which traced how religion became the vehicle of assimilation. Because it offered a shared sense of language, custom, and religion, immigrants had at first clung to national origin for security in the face of native hostility. Such identities served well those denied acceptance or who intended to return to their native lands. Although the first generation was relatively isolated from American norms, Herberg argued that the second attempted to rid itself of “immigrant foreignness” in order to benefit from “the extraordinary mobility of American society.” Identifying with their families’ communities held them back, but breaking

off those connections left them without real foundations. Adding to the alienation was a movement away from the ethnic-infused religion of their parents. Herberg's third generation accepted that being an American meant jettisoning the particularities of their descent groups but viewed religion as providing foundational identity compatible with Americanness.<sup>20</sup>

In Herberg's rendition, the three faith groups actually eased entrance into the center of America because they had become three branches of the "American religion"—by which Herberg meant something quite unlike traditional Western religions. The American religion lacked a common theology and intense emphasis on faith in an unseen, transcendent power. Instead, it was more akin to a national ideology, a conviction that American democracy stood for the brotherhood of man and the dignity of the individual human being. This shared belief system made no demand that one change her religion as she became an American; nominal differences constituted the way one claimed distinctiveness. "All other forms of self-identification and social location are either (like regional background) peripheral and obsolescent or else (like ethnic diversity) subsumed under the broader head of religions community."<sup>21</sup> President Dwight Eisenhower punctuated the point when he declared that "our government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith—and I don't care what it is."

Herberg bemoaned the lack of religious seriousness in this inclusive American creed, its evasion of ultimate questions. The growing use of the phrase *Judeo-Christian tradition* signified the convergence of the three religions on a bland moralism. It is hard to imagine nineteenth-century religious leaders accepting that similarities between those traditional faiths were more important than their differences, forming the National Conference of Christians and Jews, or celebrating Gandhi as a moral paragon rather than labeling him a pagan.<sup>22</sup> Herberg drew special attention to shifts in the Catholic Church. The Church might proclaim itself the one true church, but "in their actual social attitudes American Catholics . . . tend to think of their church as a denomination existing side by side with other denominations in a pluralistic harmony."<sup>23</sup> As William Halsey notes, many Catholics believed that the Church's concept of natural law was compatible with the Founders'.<sup>24</sup>

Religious prejudices and restrictions diminished as well. Protestants devoted less concern to converting Jews while organizations that formerly restricted or prohibited their entrance eased opposition. The American Historical Association, long a bastion of Protestant practitioners, elected its first Jewish president in 1953, Louis Gottschalk of the University of Chicago. Even those Jewish authors who mined Jewish subject matter, and wrote with an undisguised Jewish sensibility that looked askance at the world, received



terrific reviews and plaudits as leading American writers. For all their differences, Norman Mailer, Joseph Heller, Philip Roth, and Bernard Malamud won acclaim for their ability to sharpen American literature with protagonists who were neurotic, self-involved, and deeply aware of both their own limitations and the curse of conformity.<sup>25</sup>

Jews were a small percentage of the American population, perhaps 3 percent of the population in 1950. The more compelling case for the triple melting pot was that of the more numerous Catholics. Once shunned as superstitious and insular agents of the antichrist in Rome, Catholics basked in a new acceptance as full-fledged Americans who shared the values and customs of their fellow Americans. Prior to the war, even someone as tolerant as Margaret Mead regarded Catholics as deliberately insular. After the war, Protestants were more likely to credit Catholic desires to join the mainstream. Join they did, achieving prominence in all walks of life. Ed Sullivan was the nation's premier impresario on the new medium of television with his popular variety show; Jackie Gleason's *Honeymooners* succeeded in large measure because it captured working-class tenement life familiar to many viewers. Perry Como, Frank Sinatra, and Dean Martin dominated popular music. Those entertainers did not rely on explicit Catholic content, but they made no effort to deny or disguise their faith. More recognizably, Catholics were the heroes of *On the Waterfront*, the broken-boxer-turned-longshoreman Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando), who informs on corruption and murder on the Red Hook docks, and Father Barry (Karl Malden), whose assurance that Christ was present eventually persuades Malloy to protect his soul.

Just as fascinating was the role of Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, whose television show *Life Is Worth Living* was so popular that it competed in ratings with the perennial leader, the comedy-variety show *Milton Berle*. Sheen attracted viewers of all denominations in part because his discussions had no explicit Catholic doctrine and addressed matters of love and family. Still, as James T. Fisher notes, the general appearance of nondenominational Christianity was deceiving. Sheen masterfully drew upon Aquinas to challenge the chaos and meaninglessness of modern life.<sup>26</sup> Sheen had come to prominence on the radio in the 1930s with *The Catholic Hour* on NBC and had made a name for himself when he told his listeners that fighting fascism was not only a political but a theological imperative: fascism was the movement of the antichrist. Not surprisingly, he made similar claims about the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The Catholic hierarchy agreed, pitching the enemy as "godless Communism," thereby easing the way for Catholic integration into American life after years of Protestant hostility. The ability of Christians of

all stripes to oppose communist regimes in turn lessened Catholic insistence that Protestantism was a reign of error.<sup>27</sup>

John F. Kennedy was no theologian, but his election as president in 1960 pointed to the conundrums of Catholic assimilation. Still suspected by many Protestants, Kennedy took the prejudice head-on, first in the West Virginia primary and later in the general election. In a famous September address to the Southern Baptist convention in Houston, Kennedy asserted Catholics' allegiance to American values and the right to participate fully in civil and social life. He affirmed his belief in the absolute separation of church and state and decried religious tests for office, which he said would rip apart "the whole fabric of our harmonious society" and weaken the country in the midst of the Cold War. Most Catholics approved of the sentiments, though a significant number were wary that Kennedy had so thoroughly divided public and private that his Catholicism seemed totally incidental. The Jesuit editor of *America* insisted that "a man's conscience has a bearing on his public as well as his private life."<sup>28</sup>

Influential as it was, Herberg's book attracted some meaningful dissent. Critics pointed out that American religion had not fully transformed into the mushy civil religion that Herberg deplored. He did not address fundamentalist Protestantism, which retained the allegiance of large numbers of Americans throughout the period. Far from the bloodless moral creed that Herberg discerned in mainstream Protestantism, fundamentalist denominations continued to believe in biblical inerrancy, retained suspicion of the antichrist in Rome, and tended toward apocalyptic thinking.<sup>29</sup> Although by no means as prominent in their respective faiths as fundamentalists were in Protestantism, Catholics and Jews each had substantial orthodox minorities.

Commentators also took issue with Herberg's position that ethnic identity based on common national origins had lost its potency in postwar mass society. Rather than disappearing, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan suggested in *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963), ethnicity was changing. They maintained that the word first appeared in American dictionaries in 1953 signifying a new reality. "Ethnicity," they held, "is the steady expansion of the term 'ethnic groups' from minority and marginal subgroups at the edge of society—groups expected to assimilate, to disappear, to continue as survivors, exotic, or troublesome—to major elements of a society."<sup>30</sup> Ethnic groups "were recreated as something new, but still as identifiable groups." They were "not a survival from the age of mass immigration but a new social form." Many neighborhoods and work groups still remained ethnically homogenous. As Joshua Zeitz has demonstrated, residents of New York City's enclaves

continued to speak the language of the homeland at home and at neighborhood businesses well until the late 1950s. Similarly, fraternal and charitable organizations continued to structure life for many second- and third-generation ethnics.<sup>31</sup> Catholic preference for parochial schools likewise sustained ethnic divisions. Glazer and Moynihan concurred with Herberg that religion would provide the basic divisions of identity among white Americans in the future, but that had not quite happened in 1963.

### The Struggles for Inclusion

If ethnic Americans had by and large moved to the center of American life, racialized minorities had not. Conventional white liberal wisdom recognized the problems that plagued racial minorities, but insisted that Puerto Ricans, Negroes (as they were generally known at the time), and Mexicans would eventually become fully integrated, especially if they adopted mainstream cultural patterns particularly with regard to family life. Glazer and Moynihan placed as much responsibility on the distortions introduced into black life by the prominence of female-headed families, which they claimed dated from slavery, as outright discrimination. Prejudice was irrational, in their view, and would fade in due course.<sup>32</sup>

Schooled by experience, racial minorities were less sanguine. Many Puerto Ricans told stories of discrimination in education, housing, and employment despite knowing English and possessing excellent credentials. The persistence of race-based exclusion prompted formation of such new organizations as the Congress of Racial Equality (1942), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (1957), the Puerto Rican Forum (1957), and the American GI Forum (1948) to supplement the campaigns by the older National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (1909) and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) (1929) to achieve full citizenship rights. Glazer and Moynihan might have dismissed protest as “shrill” and “ineffective” (84); people of color did not.

For racial minorities, achieving inclusion entailed a challenge to a tradition of race talk that posited hierarchies based on alleged innate capacities. Black and white liberals rejected belief in biology as destiny, explaining white-black differences as the result of history and environment. The 1951 UNESCO statement on race, written with contributions from anthropologist Ashley Montagu and sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, set the tone with its bold proclamation that there existed no credible scientific knowledge that one human group was innately intellectually or emotionally superior, or that human groups differed in their inborn capacity for development.<sup>33</sup> Nearly

all postwar studies of race began from Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal's *American Dilemma* (1944). Myrdal initially found black people strange: their emotional religious services were a long way from Scandinavian Lutheranism. In time he came to realize that "in their basic human traits, the Negroes are inherently not much different from other people." As such, their differences from "other people" resulted from white refusal to treat blacks equally. "It is . . . the white majority group that naturally determines the Negro's 'place.' All our attempts to reach scientific explanations of why the Negroes are what they are and why they live as they do have regularly led to determinants on the white side of the race line."<sup>34</sup> White beliefs about black people were often the product of myth and tradition, not impartial observation. By itself, knowing the "facts" of black life would not change white attitudes, Myrdal maintained. Blacks' refusal to be a patient, submissive minority would, he hoped, erode the caste system and expose the costs of failing to honor the ideals of freedom and equality. "The bright side [of the American dilemma] is that the conquering of color caste is America's own innermost desire" (1021).

Postwar films were especially keen to criticize racial hierarchy. Generally not a subject of Hollywood productions of the 1920s and 1930s, racial problems formed the basis of a quartet of major films of 1949: *Intruder in the Dust*, *Lost Boundaries*, *Home of the Brave*, and *Pinky*.<sup>35</sup> Begun as a Broadway play, *Home of the Brave* switched its main character from Jewish to black because studio heads decided "Jews have been done." Sent out with both a long-time friend and a bigot to map a Japanese-held island, the black engineer Peter Moss becomes paralyzed when his friend dies in his arms. The bigot carries him to safety, which only intensifies his paralysis. Moss finally regains control of his body when the attending psychiatrist yells a derogatory racial term. That word breaks the spell cast by Moss's internalization of racism, and he comes to realize he is no different from anyone else. Stanley Kramer produced the film and plumbed the same territory as the director of *The Defiant Ones* (1958), a more tendentious story of two escaped chain-gang convicts, one black (Sidney Poitier) and one racist (Tony Curtis). Over the course of the film, the two learn to recognize each other's humanity and cooperate with one another, even after they break their chains. Their only hope of escape as the posse nears is to jump a freight train. Poitier hops aboard but cannot lift up the straggling Curtis. Rather than ride by himself, he jumps back down and waits with Curtis for their recapture.

The politics of Elia Kazan's *Pinky* (1949), the third highest grossing film of the year, were less consistent. *Pinky*, a young, light-skinned nurse played by the white actress Jeanne Crain (chosen over both Lena Horne and Dorothy

Dandridge), comes South to visit her illiterate laundress grandmother, Dicey (Ethel Waters). She has passed for white in the North and even has fallen in love with a white doctor, Tom Adams (William Lundigan), who knows nothing of her racial identity. In the South, Pinky faces constant harassment from police and hooligans. Requested by a black doctor to stay and train nurses, she initially declines. When her grandmother pleads with her to care for Dicey's ailing white neighbor and friend Miss Em (Ethel Barrymore), Pinky reluctantly agrees despite her long-standing enmity for the woman. Their common humanity enables them to strike up a friendship, leading Miss Em to leave her land to Pinky in her will. The will is promptly challenged, but Pinky miraculously prevails. Tracked down by Tom, who asks her to sell the land and come North passing as white, she instead embraces her racial identity and dedicates herself to a clinic and nursery school for black children.

The movie was controversial in its day, mostly for its mixed-race embrace and kiss and Tom's scandalous refusal to end the romance after learning Pinky's race. Efforts to screen the film in Texas resulted in state prohibition, leading to a landmark Supreme Court case, *Burstyn v. Wilson* (1952), that extended First Amendment protections to cinema. *New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther had a more ambivalent reaction. He appreciated the depiction of the horrors of racism but ultimately felt the film was "paternalistic" because of its stereotypes and inability to envision any resolution to racial problems other than passing or sticking to one's own kind. Writing in the *Chicago Defender*, the NAACP's Walter White also rejected both depictions of the kindly plantation mistress and the loyal house servant, as well as the depiction of black characters as solely victims of white power.

Like cinema, postwar professional sport aimed for color blindness—at least in terms of eligibility. Although blacks and Latinos had entered competition with whites in boxing and scattered track and field events prior to the war, professional sports remained segregated. Exclusion seemed particularly significant in Major League Baseball. Then considered the national pastime that embodied American values, baseball was in the eyes of many the athletic contest that best combined sheer physical skill and mental acuity. Celebrated as an avenue of Americanization, the game that introduced immigrants and their descendants to American mores, baseball had opened up to Italians (Joe DiMaggio), Poles (Al Simmons, nee Aloisius Szymanski), and Jews (Hank Greenberg) during the 1920s and 1930s. White owners, white sports writers, and white fans worried that black players would destroy the purity and legitimacy of the game and upend team chemistry. Major League Baseball remained lily-white until the Brooklyn Dodgers recruited UCLA

football star and Negro League shortstop Jackie Robinson to break the color barrier. Robinson's skill, remarkable self-control in the face of unfathomable racist abuse from spectators and opponents, and eventually acceptance from his teammates (especially Kentuckian Pee Wee Reese) insured the success of the experiment, as the phrase went, and increased the visibility of group mixing in one of the country's most symbolic endeavors. Other sports soon followed suit. By 1963, teams took it as a given that success depended upon signing stars from different racial groups. Black and Latino athletes belonged, albeit under the burden of stereotypes that they were "natural" athletes who did not always have the most robust work ethics. Even more damaging was the oft-whispered sentiment among coaches and managers that they were ill-suited for positions that allegedly required intellectual acumen (pitchers and catchers and football quarterbacks). Nonetheless, the success in sports was often trotted out as a model of opened doors for other endeavors to follow.

Not surprisingly, Robinson and Brooklyn itself became symbols of a multi-ethnic and multiracial America united by brotherhood. Bette Bao Lord's 1984 children's novel, *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*, makes the point eloquently. Excited to be joining her father in the United States in late 1946, a young girl and her mother journey from China to Brooklyn. In anticipation of a new beginning, she chooses a new American name, Shirley Temple Wong. Not knowing English or American ways, she struggles less with school work than with fitting in. Eventually turning to the radio, she begins to follow the exploits of the Dodgers in general and Robinson in particular. As his struggles mirror hers, so, too, do his successes. Her fellow students share her interest in the Dodgers, and she even learns to make a stab at stickball. In the end Shirley becomes part of the Brooklyn mosaic, joining her black, Italian, and Jewish classmates. Putting the seal on her acceptance was her selection to give the key to her school to Robinson himself.

*In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* is a loosely fictionalized—and likely romanticized—account of Lord's own American experience. Shirley's classmates easily come to regret their casual racism when they actually get to know her. Midcentury was less hospitable to Chinese Americans both in fictional portrayals and the culture as a whole. Long the object of exclusion and oppression, Americans of Chinese descent were subjected to vicious stereotypes and, prior to the postwar period, regarded as clannish and unas-similable. The idea of unbridgeable difference gradually eroded at the mid-century period. In fact, US authorities began during the war to offer a more positive vision of the Chinese as allies against Japan. In 1941, *Life* magazine ran an article (complete with photographs and a mapping of facial characteristics) instructing readers "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese." Aided by

the end of the Exclusion Act in 1943, the number of Chinese Americans reached 237,000 by 1960. Yet the growth of Chinese American communities opened questions about whether they would become full-fledged members of American society. The dilemmas of Chinese assimilation were at the heart of a best-selling novel, and a popular Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II musical and subsequent movie, *Flower Drum Song*. Written by C. Y. Lee, the novel tells the story of a rich patriarch, Master Wang, who arrives in San Francisco's Chinatown having fled the Communists. There he tries to live by traditional Chinese ways, insisting that deference be paid to elders, especially when they make marriage and career choices for their children. Immigration restrictions limited the number of available women and created both a "bachelor society," probed as well by Louis Chou's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961), and something akin to a marriage market governed by supply and demand. Wang strikes a bargain for an arranged marriage for his son Ta, who refuses and instead declares his love for a woman from a lower class. Eventually Old Wang defers to the American mode of individualism as more likely to bring family happiness and even accepts the superiority of Western medicine over Chinese herbalist medicine.

The musical and movie change the story line by dampening the licentiousness of bachelor life, class conflicts, and the economic nature of marriage. They do share Wang's preference for assimilation, even including a song "Chop Suey" that celebrates American inclusiveness. The Chinese assimilation depicted in *Flower Drum Song* did not entail anything so radical as mixing on equal terms with whites, however. Although the play and movie flattered white audiences with their validation of American culture, their popularity rested on the pageantry of musical numbers and the frisson in the presentation of exotic people. Small wonder later audiences dismissed *Flower Drum Song* as patronizing.

Postwar recoil at Nazi genocide and recognition that American apartheid put the country at a disadvantage in appealing to the peoples of the decolonizing world pushed politicians to begin to dismantle systems of exclusion. An early landmark of the new sentiment was Minneapolis mayor Hubert Humphrey's speech to the 1948 Democratic Convention. Humphrey challenged a majority report that deferred to segregationist preference, insisting that morality and political advantage at home and abroad made it necessary to support Harry Truman's civil rights program. Humphrey prevailed at the convention and thrust civil rights into the heart of national politics.<sup>36</sup>

Most important, however, was consistent pressure from people of color to effect change. Both African Americans and Mexican Americans built their postwar efforts on initiatives undertaken during the war. The League

of United Latin American Citizens was the more conservative of the Mexican American organizations. Established in Corpus Christi, LULAC did not emphasize alliances of Mexican nationals living in the United States and American citizens of Mexican descent, as previous groups had, but the rights of those of Mexican descent who were citizens. That emphasis was particularly noteworthy during the Depression when the US government deported five hundred thousand Mexicans, including some who held citizenship. The strategy to secure citizenship rights included efforts to convince the Anglo majority that Mexican Americans were no different from their fellow citizens. LULAC leadership stressed Mexican American “whiteness” and fostered assimilationist practices, particular the use of English. The organization opposed open immigration from Mexico, worried whether newcomers, especially farm workers in the *bracero* program (1942), allowed to enter the country temporarily to ease agricultural labor shortages, would be assimilable. The GI Forum, which was originally founded to secure veterans’ benefits for soldiers of Mexican descent, rejected LULAC’s claim that Mexicans were white because it allowed Anglos to constitute the jury of peers to try Mexican American defendants. The forum instead favored a pan-Mexican organizing strategy. LULAC’s assimilation philosophy did enable the organization to push forward with school desegregation cases. Its victory in *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947) established a basis for the argument that segregation by the very separation of groups conferred inferiority.<sup>37</sup>

The issue returned in slightly different form in the most celebrated court case of the period, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).<sup>38</sup> Winning school cases required the lawyers for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to demonstrate that the legally sanctioned separation of the races both resulted in unequal facilities and by its very nature marked black students as inferior, placing them at a considerable disadvantage. To argue against the controlling decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), advocates needed to show how and why separation denied one group the possibility for full enjoyment of their capacities. Unlike the lawyers in *Mendez*, the NAACP team led by Thurgood Marshall could not argue that the plaintiffs had been wrongly classified as nonwhite.

That black and white schools were unequal was not so much in dispute in the midcentury debates. State legislatures with separate school districts tacitly acknowledged the blatant inequality in facilities in the 1940s by dramatically increasing spending on all-black schools in order to preserve *de jure* segregation. Operating from the assumption of absolute incompatibility of the races, segregationists justified race separation as a matter of private racial preferences for people of similar nature. Separation was not, they insisted,



intended to reinforce inequality. Any inferiority attached to separate school systems was psychological, something black people imagined. Fund lawyers rejected the argument, contending that separation only made sense if one believed that differences between races were both meaningful and fixed. Since they were neither, segregation constituted exclusion and conferred inferiority. In a revealing confession of the NAACP focus on ending exclusion, Marshall's assistant Robert Carter later admitted that the legal team regarded segregation itself as the fundamental evil and not as a "symptom of the deeper evil of racism."<sup>39</sup> They believed schools were an entering wedge to bring down the entire edifice. Once separation was ended, black performance would improve and acceptance would follow.

As Risa Lauren Goluboff has argued, the NAACP might have attacked Jim Crow not by appealing to formal equality and psychological harms but by stressing economic harms and labor rights. Building on New Deal economic protections in private workplaces, the alternative strategy would have used the Thirteenth Amendment to challenge economic coercion. If successful, it would have given the black freedom struggle a stronger economic component that would have allowed decent wages and the right to organize for agricultural and domestic workers who were excluded from many government programs. The NAACP flirted with that approach but chose instead an all-out effort to overturn government discrimination and reverse the inferiority and stigma caused by segregation. To demonstrate psychological harm, lawyers turned to a controversial social-psychological study by Kenneth and Mamie Clark that held that segregated schools lowered black children's self-esteem. Segregationists railed against the substitution of psychology for law, conveniently overlooking that they justified segregation by touting the supposed natural psychological preference to associate solely with one's kind. In the end, Chief Justice Warren accepted that separation was tantamount to exclusion, arguing in footnote 11 of his ruling that segregation created a sense of inferiority and deprived black children "of some of the benefits they would receive in a racial[ly] integrated school system."<sup>40</sup>

Supporters overestimated the ability of *Brown* to usher in a color blind, inclusive society. The Court limited the decision's impact when it ordered districts to dismantle their dual school systems "with all deliberate speed," which segregationists interpreted to mean "slowly, if ever." Nor did *Brown* dismantle the economic, political, and psychological structures that made white supremacy necessary and appealing to many whites. "Massive resistance" by white segregationists provoked a new urgency among activists, who turned to more confrontational tactics—sit-ins, boycotts, and marches.

It also led some to emphasize self-determination for people of color rather than formal legal equality.

Liberals also overestimated their own color blindness. Many of the standards said to be universal turned out on inspection to be white and middle-class. Such was the case with the work of historian Kenneth Stampp. Stampp's *Peculiar Institution* (1956) was a direct challenge to the work of racist historian Ulrich B. Phillips, particularly *Life and Labor in the Old South* (1929). Phillips asserted that slavery civilized a barbarous people and protected them even at the cost of the economic well-being of the masters. Stampp, to the contrary, saw slavery itself as cruel and inimical to the welfare of the slaves. In a line that he would be forced to explain a decade later when a different ideological inclination prevailed, Stampp averred "slaves were merely ordinary human beings, that innately Negroes are, after all, only white men with black skins, nothing more, nothing less."<sup>41</sup> Stampp's use of the appositive "after all" signaled his universalist assumption that all peoples were similar in their common humanity. In later editions of his *magnum opus*, Stampp added a paragraph indicating that, of course, he recognized differences in culture but wanted to reject the idea that cultural differences meant blacks lacked the ability to be equal participants in American life. For his purposes, he noted, he could just as well have written that Caucasians were black people with white skin.

Although he might have put it that way, it was telling that he did not. Stampp was not the only white liberal to ignore the distinctiveness of black culture. Glazer and Moynihan, for instance, contended that the "Negro is only an American," who had no special values or culture to protect.<sup>42</sup> Milton Gordon claimed that the leadership of many mainstream African American organizations did not "envision the retention of a Negro subcommunity with its own institutions as a desirable long-range goal for Negroes in the United States."<sup>43</sup> Others followed Myrdal in emphasizing the supreme importance of slavery and segregation in defining black life. Historian Stanley Elkins envisioned slavery as sharing with Nazi death camps a tendency to dissolve all previous identity and culture. Anthropologists Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey posited that whites and blacks shared the same culture and goals. Racism frustrated black attainment of those goals, which resulted in black males neurotically exaggerating white personality traits.<sup>44</sup>

Many black intellectuals and artists, even those who campaigned vigorously for integration, recoiled from the dismissal of blackness. Ralph Ellison, Albert Murray, James Baldwin, and Lorraine Hansberry knew black people were not simply white people with black skins who lacked a culture of their

own. Throughout the period in essays and in art they revealed, sometimes inadvertently, black mores and values. Their recognition of black distinctiveness did not, however, entail agreement about the future African Americans desired. “Militant integrationists,” in the words of Henry Louis Gates, Murray, and Ellison envisioned black culture as a resource for a truly integrated and reconstituted American one.<sup>45</sup> Baldwin and Hansberry, on the other hand, doubted whites were capable of including people of color on equal terms. Although never separatists or full-blown nationalists, both eventually expressed some support for black rebels and revolutionaries.

The building blocks of Ellison’s position appeared in his unpublished review of Myrdal’s *American Dilemma*. Praising the book’s demonstration that “typical” black traits were not innate, he nonetheless objected to its overreliance on the “sterile” concept of race that made it all too easy to assume there was a near impenetrable psychological barrier between the two groups. Ellison took exception to Myrdal’s portrait of black culture as solely reactive to white power and the typical black personality as the product of “social pathology.” Myrdal failed to acknowledge blacks’ initiative and their ability to create themselves. It is, Ellison insisted, “only partially true that Negroes turn away from white patterns because they are refused participation. There is nothing like distance to create objectivity, and exclusion gives rise to counter values.” Myrdal had maintained that it was to the advantage of blacks to assimilate and acquire traits whites valued, but Ellison countered that the American culture to which blacks were to assimilate included such pathologies as lynching, Hollywood movies, faddism, and radio advertising. Ellison saw unappreciated value in black music, folklore, cuisine, dance, dramaturgy, and a tragicomic sense expressed most fully in the blues. Blacks, he claimed, “will not willingly disregard” their heritage for the sake of integration. Black contributions from that heritage were necessary to “create a more human American.”<sup>46</sup>

Ellison’s masterpiece, *Invisible Man* (1952), elaborated his point. Rejecting the social realism of the protest novel, which to his mind reduced complex people to the sum total of social forces, Ellison depicted the quest for identity of his unnamed narrator, who is both “black and American.” The book details outright racism in the Battle Royal scene in which black school boys engage in a rumble for the enjoyment of whites in the narrator’s southern hometown and in the degrading stereotypes of the culture industries (Sambo dolls being among the most notable example in the novel). Its main thrust, however, is the narrator’s engagement with the movements and ideologies that circulated among black people after Emancipation. Designed to demonstrate black initiative rather than Myrdalian passivity, written with

“blues-toned laughter,” the novel aspires to reveal “the human universals hidden within the plight” of his narrator. Ellison took the narrator through Booker T. Washington’s self-help gospel, embodied in a Tuskegee-like college experience that Ellison knew well from his years at the institute, the Marxism of the white-dominated Brotherhood, and the black nationalism of Ras, the Destroyer.<sup>47</sup> Each movement provides only a partial identity for the narrator, and each fails to deliver on its promises. Self-help fails when the authoritarian college president Bledsoe punishes the narrator for showing a white liberal donor the underside of black life—the dissolute Jim Trueblood and a saloon filled with the bitter and traumatized black veterans of World War I. The Brotherhood’s Brother Jack preaches solidarity but proves only interested in manipulating embittered residents of Harlem. Ras’s hatred extends not only to whites but also to blacks who work with them. Only by rejecting these false visions can the “invisible” narrator be visible to himself.<sup>48</sup>

Not that invisibility lacked advantages. At points the narrator courts invisibility as when he dons glasses and a hat and is taken to be the shape-shifting character Rinehart. Invisibility allows him to travel unrecognized and unencumbered by obligations. Yet it eventually proves no less fulfilling than the ideologies of post-Emancipation movements. Chased by Ras during the Harlem riots, the narrator escapes by plunging down a manhole. As the novel ends, he is residing in a portion of a basement that no one else seems to know exists, illuminated by 1,369 lights with power siphoned off from the power company, smoking marijuana and listening to Louis Armstrong. He eventually realizes that while no one can define him, humans need others. Withdrawal is not a legitimate response to those forces of conformity that prevent humans from keeping their “many parts.”

Becoming visible does not mean becoming white, however. Early on while working for Liberty Paints, the narrator learns that the company’s famous Optic White is the result of adding ten drops of black paint, a testimony to the hybridity of American life. The *Invisible Man* concludes by iterating the point: “America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them and let it so remain. It’s ‘winner take nothing’ that is the great truth of our country or of any country. Life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in the face of certain defeat. Our fate is to become one, and yet many” (576).

Even whites familiar with black culture often misunderstood it as primitive. The most infamous venture in racial borrowing among intellectuals was Norman Mailer’s 1957 essay “The White Negro.” Published in the social democratic magazine *Dissent*, Mailer’s essay joined the bohemian spirit to black culture, lauding the ways in which both Beats and blacks stood against

the conformist, “totalitarian tissues” of American society. In Mailer’s telling, blacks had been living on the margin, embracing danger, with no need for the “sophisticated inhibitions of civilization.” Praising blacks’ ability to live in the enormous present, indulging in “Saturday night kicks,” and relinquishing “the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body,” Mailer championed their ability to give voice to joy, lust, and despair in jazz. “For jazz is orgasm, it is the music of orgasm, good orgasm and bad . . . communication by art because it said ‘I feel this, and now you do too.’”<sup>49</sup>

Black intellectuals saw little advantage in an alliance that cast black people as creatures of Id who lacked bourgeois restraint and a work ethos. Ellison complained to his friend Albert Murray that Mailer, deluded that all “hipsters are cocksman possessed of great euphoric orgasms,” had placed “the same old primitivism crap in a new package.” To James Baldwin, Mailer was a poseur, a nice Jewish boy pretending to be an outlaw. Baldwin’s friend, the dramatist Lorraine Hansberry, gave Mailer credit for his opposition to conformity and prudery, but criticized his misunderstanding of the complex nature of black culture. She termed him a “New Paternalist” who reworked old slurs to show liberation from “the hanky-panky of liberalism.” By endowing blacks with special sensuality, Mailer reduced them to their oppression rather than recognized their full humanity. “White America has to believe ‘The Blacks are different—and not only so, but that, by the mystique of this difference, they actually profit in certain charming ways which escape the rest of us with all our engrossing complexities.’”<sup>50</sup>

Hansberry was equally suspicious of facile universalism, particularly when critics interpreted her famous 1959 play *Raisin in the Sun* as a tale of the triumph of the human spirit. The *New York Times*, for example, misquoted Hansberry to the effect that she regarded herself as a playwright who just happened to be black. Some black critics likewise characterized Hansberry as a liberal who failed to engage with the distinctive culture and experience of black Americans. In his 1967 classic *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, the Marxist-turned-black-nationalist Harold Cruse considered *Raisin* the swan song of the integrationist ideal of universalism. Intended for white people, the play celebrated black conformity to white ideals. Because Hansberry was the daughter of Chicago realtors who won the landmark case against restrictive covenants—but who later were cited for buildings below code—Cruse declared she knew little of black suffering. The play turns on divvying up the life insurance policy of the deceased patriarch, Big Walter Younger, worth \$10,000—a sum, according to Cruse, that was beyond the reach of the vast majority of black people. A child of privilege, Hansberry had no real understanding of black culture as far as Cruse was concerned. Still others have

pointed to her willingness to point to aesthetic and political lessons from classical and Western sources as indicative of her universalist, integrationist aspirations.<sup>51</sup>

White audiences might well have found the play inspiring and even reassuring, but Hansberry sharply denied that the play could have featured an American family of any race. Universality in drama, she maintained to famed radio interviewer Studs Terkel, came through “very great attention to the specific. It emerges from the truthful identity of what is.” Audiences could talk about the universality of the play because the family at the heart of the play is definitively “a Negro family, specifically and definitely culturally,” but more specifically not “even a New York family or a Southern Negro family. It is specifically South Side of Chicago.” It is, she insisted, “definitely a Negro play before it’s anything else.”<sup>52</sup> *Raisin* is in fact filled with distinctive features of black history and culture. Walter’s sister, Beneatha, dates an African student, and she adopts more natural dress and beauty standards despite teasing from the rest of the family. When finally pushed by the “Welcoming Committee,” the younger Walter asserts family pride to refuse the pressure to leave and even fantasizes being like the African nationalist leader Jomo Kenyatta. The reference was only one of many to black revolutionaries in Hansberry’s plays.

Hansberry’s cosmopolitanism prevented her from embracing separatism. The Nation of Islam (NOI), on the other hand, emerged as the premier separatist organization of the era. Founded in 1930 in Chicago, NOI boldly advanced an origin story of black chronological primacy upset by white devils later created to suppress black achievement and freedom through lies, eugenic elimination, and outright seizure of power. It preached black pride, discipline, and achievement as crucial to the establishment and maintenance of orderly communities. The Nigerian scholar E. U. Essien-Udom, who did fieldwork with NOI, concluded that the sense of purpose NOI conveyed rather than its version of Islam accounted for its growing appeal. Essien-Udom further noted that NOI was unique among black nationalist organizations in that it made little reference to any African nation, specific ethnic history, or cultural resources from either the African or the African American past. In light of its claim of white devil destruction of black culture, it pledged a complete reconstruction. NOI naming practices (Malcolm X being the most well-known) in which American blacks dropped names of former masters as symbolic of their old, slave past were indicative of that goal. NOI separatism was apparent as well in the relative silence of its midcentury leader, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, about African independence movements or the burgeoning civil rights movement

in the United States. The NOI held the civil rights movement in disdain, condemning its integrationist goals as assimilationist and dependent on a nonexistent reservoir of good will among the white devils. Talk of love and coexistence, its members said, would never build a meaningful racial identity. Business success, the elimination of neighborhood crime, and the use of the temple as a community center prompted growth in membership. By 1959, NOI boasted some fifty temples and enrolled followers, depending on the source, as high as two hundred thousand. Made famous by the CBS news special *The Hate That Hate Produced*, the NOI excited white fears of violent confrontation, although its members never carried weapons. Its hope was to establish a homeland where blacks could determine their own destiny, not to wage war against whites.<sup>53</sup>

Just as people of color rejected long-standing beliefs about their supposed lesser intellectual capacity and distorted values and inclinations, so, too, did women pushing for inclusion discard prevailing notions of their more passive, emotional, and selfless nature. Such beliefs had long justified the relegation of women to nurturing and supportive roles, and their exclusion from the world of commerce and politics. It was the aim of Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963) to expose how such misconceptions had diminished the full range of women's capabilities and limited their participation in American life. A Smith College graduate, Friedan (1921–2006) won a psychology fellowship to work under Erik Erikson at Berkeley but, under pressure from her then boyfriend, she abandoned PhD work. She then turned to journalism, working for, among other places, the paper of the left-leaning United Electrical Workers. Let go after she became pregnant with her second child, she turned to freelancing for women's magazines. While surveying college graduates about the state of their postcollegiate lives for a presentation at her fifteenth college reunion in 1957, she hit upon the topic that would form the basis of her magnum opus—the famous problem with no name.<sup>54</sup>

Friedan found that marriage and motherhood did not relieve college-educated women of feelings of purposeless and emptiness. This omnipresent sense of incompleteness derived from what Friedan termed the “feminine mystique.” The mystique was a near-universal belief that located the very core of womanhood in creation and nurture of life, investing biological functions with a spiritual and transcendent quality. Women needed only to accept their nature to fulfill their destiny. The intense promulgation of the ideology, Friedan contended, convinced women to leave their World War II-era jobs for family homes. But as the dissatisfaction of her classmates indicated, homemaking neither brought personal tranquility nor aided the social good. By exaggerating the power of anatomy, Friedan asserted, the

mystique denied women their full status as human. The failure of domestic life to deliver the expected rewards prompted women to seek relief from the nameless frustration in self-destructive behavior. Perhaps most devastating was “mounting sex hunger,” the one avenue that promised women a feeling of vitality. Women lived a stunted existence, Friedan charged, because Americans refused to recognize that women, like men, sought opportunities for personal growth and the development of their talents as human beings. It was her hope that the mounting dissatisfaction among women marked “a turning point from an immaturity that has been called femininity to full human identity.”<sup>55</sup>

*Mystique* was filled with stories of intelligent women who bowed to social expectations and cut short educational and career objectives in exchange for the “Mrs.” degree. The great contribution of the book was to provide a compelling explanation of how the ideology of domesticity was refurbished, spread, and internalized after the war. Friedan mapped the wide array of institutions that promoted the idea that women’s identity was defined by their biological condition. She especially singled out women’s magazines (more often than not edited by men for the stereotypical woman of the home), advertisements with images of childlike, oversexualized women, and Freudian psychology, which provided a supposedly scientific justification for the mystique. Modern-day psychological discourse put penis envy, the desire for the male organ and the power it embodied, at the center of female psychology and posited that women could compensate for their lack by fully embracing motherhood.

Friedan grounded her argument for a common humanity embracing women as well as men in the revisionist theories of identity formation advanced by Erikson and humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow. Maslow posited a pyramid of needs ranging from the physiological at the bottom to the self-actualization at the apex. Self-actualization needs, including morality, creativity, and spontaneity, came into play when individuals engaged in a quest to achieve their full potential. Erikson’s stages and Maslow’s pyramid of development were conceived as tasks for men, but Friedan saw their applicability for women and for society. “If women’s needs for identity, for self-esteem, for achievement, and finally for expression of her unique human individuality are not recognized by herself or others in our culture, she is forced to seek identity and self-esteem in the only channels open to her: the pursuit of sexual fulfillment, motherhood, and the possession of material things” (315–16). Friedan therefore urged women to reject deadening housework (342), reduce their investment in marriage (344), and train themselves for meaningful work. “Who knows,” Friedan asked at the conclusion of her



book, “of the possibilities of love when men and women share not only children, home, and garden, not only the fulfillment of their biological roles, but also the responsibilities and passions of the work that creates the human future and the full human knowledge of who they are?” (378).

*The Feminine Mystique* has rightly earned a place as a feminist classic—one of those works that not only documents gender oppression but also provides a coherent and meaningful account of how it occurs. The book’s staying power owes much to its incisive and accessible language. Friedan’s indictment of American gender relations immediately struck a responsive chord with her readers. Many women wrote to Friedan enthusiastically, crediting the book with giving voice to the dissatisfaction they felt and opening up possibilities to challenge what Friedan had termed the “comfortable concentration camp” of wife and mother roles.

The book was not without its limitations. Critics have noted how Friedan often let white, middle-class suburban women stand in for women as a whole. Concentrating on college-educated women, she gave little attention to the experiences of working-class women or women of color, who were less likely to be subjected to the mystique or to be able to forfeit a paycheck to work at home. Indeed, Friedan may well have overemphasized the postwar return to domesticity. Throughout the 1950s, the number of married women in the workforce grew by 42 percent. The feminist poet Eve Merriam even produced a children’s book, *Mommies at Work* (1961), to celebrate the growing ranks of wage-earning mothers.<sup>56</sup> Susan Hartmann has shown that Cold War rhetoric simultaneously insisted that the family was a foundation of national defense and urged increased productivity. The first envisioned women in the home; the second implied places for them in the workforce. Both the National Manpower Council and the Commission on the Education of Women recommended childcare grants and supplements for higher education, particularly in the sciences.<sup>57</sup> Nor could one say that the era lacked for creative women. Their presence in no way refutes the notion of male domination of American letters, but the postwar prominence of such female authors as Hannah Arendt, Harriette Arnow, Elizabeth Bishop, Gwendolyn Brooks, Rachel Carson, Janet Flanner, Lorraine Hansberry, Jane Jacobs, Margaret Mead, Mary McCarthy, Diana Trilling, Lillian Smith, Flannery O’Connor, Jean Stafford, and Eudora Welty make the era as filled with women’s voices as any previous period.<sup>58</sup>

Others have pointed out that Friedan’s portrait of the intellectual climate was incomplete. Orthodox psychoanalytic opinion on gender and sexuality, for example, was considerably more varied than she acknowledged. Although there was a good deal of reductionism in psychoanalytic debates, not all ana-

lysts believed that female psychological health dictated domestic confinement. Friedan used Lundberg's and Farnham's misogynist *Modern Woman* as representative of Freudianism, although neither author was an analyst and the *Psychoanalytic Journal* criticized the book as retrograde and analytically confused.<sup>59</sup> And as historian Joanne Meyerowitz has shown, women's magazines offered mixed messages about women's lives. Readers were just as likely as not to find articles praising female creativity and assertion, rejecting nurturing love as the highest expression of femininity, and recommending marriages based on true sharing.<sup>60</sup>

Contrary to legend, Friedan did not singlehandedly revive feminism or provide its intellectual basis. Other contemporary feminists recognized the role of biology and psychology in providing justification for circumscribing female aspiration. Such prominent writers as Ruth Herschberger (1917–2014) and Eve Merriam (1916–1992) provided incisive dissents from the conventional wisdom about women's nature and sharp arguments for their emancipation from restricted status. Like Friedan, Herschberger and Merriam were also Jewish, held advanced degrees, and had left-wing connections. Like *Mystique*, Herschberger's *Adam's Rib* (1948) and Merriam's *After Nora Slammed the Door: American Women in the 1960s, The Unfinished Revolution* (1964) opposed motherhood as the sole natural role for women and female deference as a *modus operandi*. The books also shared a resolve to chart the institutions that restricted women's possibilities, a project Merriam had undertaken as well with *Figleaf* (1960), an analysis of the fashion industry's manipulation of women.<sup>61</sup>

Both Herschberger and Merriam set their sights on biological science, which had played such an important role in defining women's potential. From their vantage point, studies of sex differences all too often proceeded by taking male and female qualities as simply given. In her 1944 dismantling of Robert Yerkes's famous work with chimps, Herschberger showed how Yerkes's loaded language and tendentious interpretations of evidence resulted in claims that males were naturally assertive and females depended on sexual allure.<sup>62</sup> Responding to assertions that women could not do work involving abstractions because they were naturally concrete thinkers, Merriam noted the tremendous success of those women who were allowed to enroll in theoretical physics classes.<sup>63</sup> Nor was science the only institution that misperceived women's abilities. The assumption of female difference was embedded in language itself. "Not the least of man's capacities," Merriam argued, "is our male-oriented language" (208). One form of asserting male dominance, Merriam wrote, was "to assign the female to her place as a non-man and set her aside" (206). Another was to incorporate women in a larger whole. The

word *man*, she noted, has come to stand for both sexes. Merriam hoped that eventually American society would be organized to “make use of the full individual,” but she contended that women needed to overcome the ill effects of internalization of assertions of female difference (67).

For gays and lesbians, belonging was especially challenging. Facing both legal prohibition and social condemnation, most survived by not openly declaring the nature of their sexual desire. Prior to the war, there were few communities fostering a conscious gay or lesbian identity. San Francisco, Chicago, and New York did have special meeting places such as public baths or particular parks; there were distinctive customs for signaling interest, and special roles and traits associated with “fairies” or “butches.” The end of Prohibition made possible bar-based cultures, which strengthened fragile homosexual communities. By throwing together large groups of like-inclined men and women who suddenly realized how prevalent their desires were, World War II intensified the process.<sup>64</sup>

The wartime experience also alerted the larger heterosexual community to the presence of gays and lesbians and prompted repressive measure efforts. New laws required bars and dance halls to surveil their patrons and prohibit same-sex dancing. Other laws were designed to harass drag queens. Gays and lesbians were especially vulnerable at work. Inappropriate gender presentation and accusations of homosexual activity were grounds for dismissal. Dwight Eisenhower tried to rid the WACs of lesbians but stopped when he realized that nearly 80 percent of his female support staff would be drummed out of the corps. He did manage to issue executive orders that classified homosexual government employees as security risks, a position upheld by the Senate Subcommittee on Investigations. The liberal journalist Max Lerner devoted a twelve-part series to debunking myths about gay and lesbian mental health and proclivities, but to little effect. More government employees were dismissed for sex deviation than for communist sympathies.<sup>65</sup>

The war also accelerated the medicalization of same-sex attraction and gender transgression. As psychiatrists examined draftees for their suitability for service, they derived criteria that would classify the population as normal or abnormal.<sup>66</sup> Freud’s own 1935 judgment that homosexuality, while no advantage, was nothing to “be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness,” made no impression in a psychoanalytic atmosphere devoted to adjustment and orderly development. Instead, a sizable portion of the psychiatric and psychoanalytic communities devoted itself to “curing” homosexuality. Prevailing theory held same-sex desire as a result of incomplete Oedipal resolutions often caused by improper parenting. Few “cures” succeeded.

Despite public condemnation, gay men and women often managed to live lives outside the closet in the immediate postwar years. In some fields, open homosexuality did them little damage. The music and theater worlds provided a liminal space that recognized the homosexuality of some of its members, while keeping their sexual identity a secret to audiences. Musicians knew of Leonard Bernstein's and Aaron Copeland's homosexuality, which did not damage their careers. Bernstein went on to write the music for the incomparable *West Side Story*, working with other gay men, choreographer Jerome Robbins, lyricist Stephen Sondheim, and author Arthur Laurents. Robbins, a one-time Communist Party member, had resisted naming names until threatened with public revelation of his homosexual trysts.<sup>67</sup> Civil rights activist and pacifist Bayard Rustin was not purged from organizations after his arrest for "lewd behavior," although he was often shunted to the background.

The push for belonging intensified with the founding of two homophile societies in the 1950s. The Mattachine Society, founded in 1950 in Los Angeles by Henry Hay, a member of the Communist Party, and supported by fashion designer Rudi Gernreich, originally aimed at establishing unity among gay men to fight antigay discrimination and police entrapment, and to create "an ethical homosexual culture" modeled on those of the "Negro, Mexican, and Jewish peoples." The Daughters of Bilitis, an organization for lesbians begun in San Francisco by Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin in 1955, very soon defined itself as "A Woman's Organization for the purpose of Promoting the Integration of the Homosexual into Society."<sup>68</sup> Membership in both organizations was at first small. Mattachine, patterned on the Communist Party, had cells, different levels of membership, and a commitment to developing a group consciousness as an oppressed "class" in order to liberate themselves. By 1953, membership reached an estimated two thousand, but Cold War worries led to the resignation of Hay and other communists the same year.

The new leadership was considerably less militant. The legal director of the Mattachine Society accepted that the police were right to prevent public indecencies but hoped that authorities would accept that sexual activity was of no interest to the law when done between consenting adults in private. Engaged in projects of public education, members of the homophile organizations rarely broached the notion of Fourteenth Amendment equal protection rights for all gays, emphasizing instead a politics of gay respectability. The Daughters of Bilitis journal, *The Ladder*, printed on the inside cover the organization's statement of purpose that emphasized education for the "variant" (one of the various euphemisms for homosexuals) in order that she

would understand herself and hasten adjustment to society. The organization pledged to encourage dress and manners acceptable to mainstream society on the grounds that gender nonconforming behavior alienated potential allies. Historian Nan Boyd has characterized the attitude as “change can only be accomplished in the proper way and manner and by the proper people” and has noted that it did not prevent ordinary gay and lesbians from claiming their own space and constructing a burgeoning queer culture.<sup>69</sup>

A few scientists provided intellectual support for the contention of homophile organizations that homosexuals shared mainstream attitudes and values. Alfred Kinsey had attracted attention, and considerable criticism, for placing sexuality on a spectrum rather than accepting a strict hetero-homosexual divide. His conclusion that same-sex contact was more prevalent than expected particularly upset moralists. Less publicized but in many respects more significant was the work of Evelyn Hooker. A psychologist, Hooker undertook the study of homosexual mental health after a challenge from one of her homosexual students at UCLA. Based on her exchanges with him and his friends, she came to doubt the prevailing classification of homosexuality as an illness. Aided by the Mattachine Society, she chose thirty homosexuals and thirty heterosexual men and paired them according to IQ and education. None had sought psychological help or spent time in prison. Hooker administered her subjects the most common personality tests of the day, including the Thematic Apperception Test and the Rorschach Inkblot Test, and had leading psychologists and psychiatrists evaluate the tests without informing them of the sexual orientation of the test takers. The evaluators could discern no difference between homosexual and heterosexual men, bolstering the case for full inclusion in society. Although Hooker’s work first appeared in 1957 and was often duplicated, it took until 1973 for the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from its manual of disorders.<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps the most fascinating account of the experience of homosexuality was Donald Webster Cory’s *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach* (1951). Cory was the pen name of Edward Sagarin, and his book was part testimonial of his own wrenching struggles with his sexuality, part social investigation, and part political statement. Cory set out to delineate both the experience of homosexuality and the social and political dynamics that governed it. The long history of homosexuality enabled him to dispute the characterization of homosexuality as unnatural and a threat to civilization and homosexuals as moral outlaws. The “sordid character” of gay men stemmed from the social attitudes that victimized them, he countered. “A person cannot live in an atmosphere of universal rejection, of widespread pretense, of a society that outlaws and banishes his activities and his desires,

of a social world that jokes and sneers at every turn, without a fundamental influence on his personality."<sup>71</sup> Just as white society created the Negro problem, so too did heterosexual society create the homosexual problem. To be gay was to be caught in a vicious circle, with the consequences of inequality used to justify inequality in the first place.

The solution, Cory held, was to speak forthrightly as openly gay people. That gay men could so easily pass was not a blessing. "Actually, the inherent tragedy—not the saving grace—of homosexuality is found in the ease of concealment. If the homosexual were as readily recognizable as . . . other minority groups, the social condemnation could not possibly exist. Stereotype thinking on the part of the majority would . . . collapse of its own absurdity if all of us who are gay were known for what we are. . . . If only all of the inverts, the millions in all lands, could simultaneously rise up in our full strength!"<sup>72</sup> A gay organization should aim not for social tolerance, which Sagarin saw as condescending, but for acceptance of "inverts" on equal footing with other members of the community.

Although Cory's book inspired numerous gay and lesbian readers, he himself stayed in the closet for much of his life. As Edward Sagarin, he went on to be a professor of sociology who specialized in deviance and contended homosexuality was not normal. Even as Corey, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he rejected as unscientific Hooker's dismissal of the deviance model. Having undertaken his 1951 book to demonstrate that same-sex desire was "involuntary, as if inborn," Corey accepted that homosexuality was attributable to family dysfunction and that the well-adjusted homosexual was a fiction. Efforts to win office in the New York Mattachine Society came to naught. Sagarin later opposed gay liberation and condemned gender transgressions.

Despite his tangled personal history, Sagarin still paved the way for other attacks on the closet. Jeannette Howard Foster, who had worked as a librarian at Indiana University for Alfred Kinsey's sex research projects, self-published *Sex Variant Women in Literature* in 1956. The book enjoyed something of a *samizdat* life until reissued in 1975. By the late 1960s gender nonconforming behavior and dress appeared in numerous gay and lesbian communities, not only in large coastal cities of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York but also, as Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis have demonstrated, in the working-class precincts of Buffalo, New York.<sup>73</sup> That Sagarin/Corey did not recognize the realization of his wish that homosexuals speak as themselves is testimony how the struggle for inclusion created divisions not only among homosexuals but also, in this case, within the personality of one of its original advocates.

## The Tentative Border Crossing of American Music

It was no coincidence that Norman Mailer's "White Negro" depended so much on attributing anarchical impulses to jazz musicianship. For much of American history, whites have turned to black music as a source of energy, often to salve real and imaginary wounds. Such cultural appropriation has yanked the music out of its context, stereotyped black thought and culture as primitive and unschooled, and denied black musicians credit and remuneration. In the first half of the twentieth century, formal critical opinion dismissed the aesthetic quality of black and Latino music as lacking complexity, rigor, or spirituality. Music industry executives were less devoted to hierarchies of quality than to a classification scheme that reflected existing tastes. Such schemes took the uncertainty out of selling records and usually specified the sociological characteristics of the audience rather than any particular musical qualities per se. The pop, country, and race (later rhythm and blues) charts designated music marketed to white middle-class, white southern, and black listeners respectively, rather than a particular style or form of musical expression. Race records, for instance, were a musical hodgepodge, lumping together gospel, electric and country blues, black pop, and doo-wop. Because they were rooted in race and class, the charts were assumed to define self-contained, mutually exclusive tastes. For many critics and record executives, postwar jazz constituted a different category, especially since many musicians during and after the war aspired to make music that resisted racial and commercial appropriation.<sup>74</sup>

At first glance, then, it seemed unlikely that white audiences would appreciate the skill, dedication, and intelligence of minority musicians, or that white musicians would borrow black or Latino elements without parodying, exaggerating, or misconceiving them. Yet there were moments in the 1950s that constituted meaningful border crossings in which musicians and audiences transcended rigid commercial and critical boundaries and demonstrated honest and respectful appreciation of other music. If charts, jukeboxes, and radio formats were still segregated, not all listeners' tastes were. The airwaves, especially clear channels at night, were available to anyone with a set, allowing listeners to sample across the boundaries of genre and ethnicity. White consumers, particularly teenagers, did not feel an allegiance to their parents' taste. The interchange was more likely in places where musical cultures overlapped, such as along the Mississippi River. One such listener, Elvis Presley, demonstrated his love for rhythm and blues when he started playing Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup's "That's All Right Mama" during a break in what had been an unsuccessful recording session at Sam Phillips's

Sun Studio in Memphis. Border crossing was not solely white interest in black music. Black listeners, contrary to expectations, knew their country and western music. One such listener, Chuck Berry, incorporated the fiddle tune “Ida Red” into his first hit record “Maybellene” in 1955. It was the melding of influences, supported by crossover listeners, that led to one of the crucial innovations of American music, rock ’n’ roll.

East St. Louis–born trumpeter Miles Davis’s border crossing was even more eclectic, a demonstration of the degree to which jazz had become incessantly creative. A student at Juilliard, Davis found the school mired in European classical music yet valuable for the music theory he learned there. After dropping out, he went to work for bebop pioneer Charlie Parker. Parker’s great innovation was his playing the alto saxophone in flurries of sixteenth notes rather than the four steady beats per bar, piling new chords and syncopated melodies on top of extended chords. Parker’s method was especially striking in his innovative improvisations from old standards and popular show tunes. Parker became an idol to musicians such as Davis because he spurned the role of the musician as entertainer who courted his audience. When Davis struck out on his own in the late 1940s, he followed Parker’s lead, becoming the epitome of the removed, fiercely proud black artist. He retained as well Parker’s predilection for middle range, muted tones. Working with Canadian-born arranger Gil Evans, Davis slowed down the furious pace of bebop and supplemented it with harmonies drawn from European impressionist composers. Jazz critic Gary Giddins has noted the combination of swing, bop, and classical techniques that produced “cloudlike chords in which the harmonies slipped seamlessly one to the next and breathlessly long phrases.”<sup>75</sup> With *Birth of the Cool* (recorded 1950, released 1957), Davis and Evans innovatively used paired instruments in the nine-piece group to achieve a unified sound that Davis insisted resembled human voices singing.

Tempestuous and often cruel to lovers and other musicians, Davis was a restless artist throughout the 1950s, moving through cool and hard bop. In 1959, he built upon pianist George Russell’s concept of tones that rested on a new mode, the Lydian, which emphasized fifths. Russell expanded upon early-modern church music to establish twelve-tone chromatic scales. Working with pianist Bill Evans (no relation to Gil) and saxophonist John Coltrane, Davis expanded the jazz vocabulary. In *Kind of Blue* (1959), Evans departed from usual practice when he did not play the full chords that players used to set the harmonies. The album, as the name suggests, constituted as much a meditation on the blues as a blues itself. In one fell swoop, Davis had created a new music that was most definitely part of black culture yet more syncretic. In the process, he consolidated jazz as a different type of art music.<sup>76</sup>



Not all interchanges were as creative or as respectful. Black musicians constantly had to negotiate popular prejudice and professional exploitation. To be sure, there was something amounting to a moral panic in the press from mental health professionals and religious authorities about the imagined animal spirits that popular black music awakened in listeners. *Time* magazine claimed that fans of rock 'n' roll were as mindless as Hitler's followers.<sup>77</sup> More serious damage came from white entrepreneurs who negotiated disadvantageous contracts with black performers (the disc jockey and impresario Alan Freed got songwriting credit for Chuck Berry's "Maybellene" in return for pushing it to his considerable following). Black artists often found themselves elbowed out of mainstream attention when record executives employed white artists to perform songs that black musicians had written, altering the lyrics, rhythm, or presentation to reduce any perceived threat from black male swagger and the defiance that went with it. Pat Boone, a Columbia English major, was famous for performing covers of Fats Domino and Little Richard hits, interspersed with crooning ballads. Boone's versions sold exceedingly better than the originals among white teenagers. It was not only the case that white teenagers found his records more accessible, they were also more likely to receive airplay, and were more often found in record stores that white record buyers frequented. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, white musicians had perfected their imitations, bequeathing white music with, in the words of Eric Lott, "the cool, virility, humility, or *gaité de couer* that were the prime components of white ideologies of black manhood."<sup>78</sup>

The cultural interactions at work in the history of "Hound Dog" involved both collaboration and exploitation, ventriloquism and fruitful exchange. It is the story of a song written by two Jewish songwriters for a gender transgressive female blues singer and redone in a new fashion by a white working-class southerner. The songwriters were Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, who fell in love with black culture and produced hits for such black groups as the Coasters and the Drifters. By most accounts, group members were impressed with the depth of the songwriters' knowledge of black culture and their respect for black life. Yet they did not always shy away from songs that emphasized black clownishness or black animal sexuality. In writing "Hound Dog" for Big Mama Thornton, they wrote for a singer whose short hair, male clothing, and gruff manner made her a distinctive female presence. They expected she would growl the song that drew upon the blues motifs to tell the story of a woman who rids herself of a gigolo, but Thornton's first run-through was more akin to crooning. Efforts to tell her how to sing led her to counter that a white boy had no standing to tell her how to sing the blues. Eventually a rapprochement was reached and Thornton added her own interpretative ele-

ments, which led her later to claim ownership of the song in an effort to get fair remuneration from Houston-based Peacock Records. “Hound Dog” rose to the top of the R&B chart in 1953 and would have sold even more copies had other labels not issued their own versions and “answer” records.<sup>79</sup>

Although he knew the original, it was a parody version that Elvis Presley really enjoyed when he saw it performed in Las Vegas some three years later. Presley’s version, which featured machine-gun drumming and an unusual guitar solo, lacked Thornton’s double entendres and her blues rhythm. In its stead, Presley added a Latin riff and a sneer (supposedly anger at being made fun of during a television appearance). A testimony to eclectic tastes, Elvis’s 1956 version topped the R&B and country charts and reached number two on the pop chart. *Melody Maker* dismissed the record as thoroughly bad, loud, and incoherent. Bob Dylan, on the hand, claimed that hearing it in Minnesota at the age of fifteen changed his life. For their part, Leiber and Stoller did not like Presley’s version, thinking it too nervous, too fast, and lacking Thornton’s bite. Presley thought it a diversion, the silliest song he ever recorded.

Elvis had a less self-conscious relationship with other cultures than Leiber and Stoller. He grew up close to black neighborhoods in Memphis and bought his clothes at the leading clothier for black people. He deeply imbibed black blues and rhythm and blues (but not jazz, which never found favor with poor whites). Reflecting on the environment he knew from childhood, Presley admitted to *Jet* magazine that “nobody can sing that kind of music like colored people . . . I know that. But I always liked that kind of music.”<sup>80</sup>

The case for Presley being part of the white minstrelsy tradition of love and theft is not open and shut. Being part of the southern white working class, he did not feel the stultifying nature of suburban life that prompted white bohemians to exoticize black culture as a source of energy and authenticity. Although the white working class had the privilege of white skin, it experienced a measure of denigration and dismissal. Presley drew on white trash traditions of masculinity as well as black ones. For his Sun Records sides, he melded blues with a country beat. This combination of various elements, when played faster than the blues, was extremely danceable. Originally rejected by country stations as too black and by rhythm-and-blues stations as too white, Elvis achieved musically what previous rockabilly musicians who had mixed country and rhythm and blues had not. Where they had seasoned their country elements with rhythm and blues, Elvis more thoroughly merged them, producing a music that Peter Guralnick terms “nervously up tempo.”<sup>81</sup>

In the end, it was less his sound than his sexuality that attracted the most attention—exciting audiences and offending censorious critics with

his gyrations. His self-presentation earned him the derisive name “Elvis the Pelvis” and famously prompted television impresario Ed Sullivan to shoot him from the waist up during his performances. Black rock ‘n’ roll pioneers who hoped to cross over with white audiences had to navigate the pitfalls inherent in sexual expression more deliberately. For Little Richard, born Richard Penniman, removing the threat of black male sexuality meant an exaggerated performance style he amplified to nearly comic proportions. Sporting a flamboyant homosexuality and wild man persona, the boogie-woogie piano-playing Little Richard combined an outlandish stage presence with lyrics such as the original ones for “Tutti Frutti” (1956)—“Tutti frutti, loose booty If it don’t fit, don’t force it You can grease it, make it easy”—and the slightly less scandalous “Good golly, Miss Molly, you sure like to ball.” Playing the clown partially removed the threat, although it did not obscure his musical genius, which even tamer versions by white artists could not eliminate.

Chuck Berry took the opposite tack. He attempted to defuse tensions in witty, well-crafted lyrics that, unlike rhythm and blues, obscured or removed his physical presence from the songs. Eschewing the braggadocio of many front men, Berry wrote in the third person or quickly turned attention away from his desires—as he did in “Maybellene” by making the car chase paramount (even if that chase could be interpreted as a double entendre). Much of his early success came from his ability to pitch his music to a broader integrated audience with songs that spoke more directly to the high school and teenage experience (“Oh Baby Doll” and “School Days”). His signature moves—a one-legged hop and the “duck walk”—gave his performances a swagger that was less sexual than Penniman’s leg thrown on his piano. The persona failed to protect him, however. Charged in 1962 with violating the Mann Act for having relations with a fourteen-year-old girl he brought from Mexico to work in his St. Louis nightclub, Berry was convicted by an all-white, all-male jury in a trial that had to be retried because of the racist comments of the presiding judge. Released a year later, his popularity never quite recovered.

If never as popular as white musicians whom they influenced, Penniman and Berry established the framework of the new music. Their emphasis on volume and tempo underscored the beat. Berry was particularly innovative. Like Little Richard, he merged boogie-woogie played at eight beats to a bar, which changed the shuffle that boogie-woogie usually had, with an emphasis on even rather than initial beats, the famous backbeat “you can’t lose.” The first “guitar hero,” Berry often played double notes on the high strings, which gave the music an unprecedented density. Throughout the career that

followed, Berry was alternatively celebrated (Beatle John Lennon once said rock 'n' roll should be called "Chuck Berry") and shamelessly copied.

Subsequent fame did not always compensate for real snubs and damages, however. Berry wrote very little about the pains and frustrations of being black, yet the wounds occasionally cropped up, albeit in transfigured, metaphorical form. "Handsome, Brown-Eyed Man"—a song that moves the question of color from skin to eye—makes a sly wink at white women's interest in black men, exclaiming that the interest dated "back ever since the world began." Such humor was less apparent in the seemingly innocent "School Days," in which the singer escapes from the drudgery of school for the joys of playing rock 'n' roll on the jukebox, which will "deliver me from days of old." That reference to racism constitutes a reminder that for all their innovations in boundary crossing, Berry and other black musicians were not yet living in the "more human" America of Ralph Ellison's imagination.



## CHAPTER SIX



# Modern Enactments

Looking back on the postwar era from the vantage point of the late 1960s, the critic Irving Howe evoked the feeling of belatedness with which he and his fellow “New York Intellectuals” had encountered the great classics of literary modernism. “The New York writers came at the end of the modernist experience,” Howe wrote, and while they continued to champion Joyce, Eliot, and Kafka in the face of a crude realist aesthetics that still held sway in many quarters, “*they came late*” and knew it. The great achievements had all been made, “modernism was entering its period of decline; the old excitements had paled and the old achievements had been registered. Modernism had been successful; it was no longer a literature of opposition, and thereby had begun a metamorphosis signifying ultimate death.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, there is considerable evidence to support Howe’s view. The canonization of turn-of-the century modernism was in full force by the 1950s, and with it the divestment of the movement’s connection to the socialist left, bohemian assaults on Victorian morality, and the critique of rationalism that reached fever pitch in Dada and Surrealism. The New Criticism in literary studies and the formalist art criticism of Clement Greenberg disavowed the anticultural and irrationalist currents of modernism in close readings of modern works that emphasized writers’ and artists’ explorations of their own media. Only a tiny audience had existed in the United States before the war that was knowledgeable about modern literature, art, dance, architecture, and music, but by the late 1940s there was a network of institutions offering courses on those subjects, including Bennington, Sarah Lawrence, Mills, the

New School for Social Research, the experimental Black Mountain College, and even such Ivies as Harvard and Yale. Students at those institutions benefited from the “paperback revolution” that made major works of modern literature, criticism, and philosophy available in inexpensive editions. Meanwhile, European refugees from Nazism and the horrors of World War II brought a cosmopolitan sensibility and deep knowledge of modernist formal innovations to American film, painting, sculpture, architecture, and design. Their work appeared in Hollywood movies, advertisements, and corporate logos, as well as upscale galleries. American admirers of the first wave of European modernists came to occupy important positions within the federal government, where they worked to project an image of the United States as a cultured nation and waged a two-front campaign against cultural conservatives at home and Soviet influence abroad. The State Department enlisted modern architects to design shows of modern American art for world’s fairs and other international exhibitions, and sponsored tours by modern writers, dancers, and musicians to demonstrate a “cultural freedom” unavailable in the Soviet bloc.<sup>2</sup> As if to complete the official embrace of modernism, the 1961 inauguration of John F. Kennedy featured a reading by Robert Frost, once a hero of early modern poetics now recast as a folksy Yankee individualist. Kennedy’s remarks at the dedication of the Frost Memorial Library at Amherst in October 1963 drew on the poet’s example in upholding the ideal of the “great artist” as the “last champion of the individual mind and sensibility against an intrusive society and an officious state.”<sup>3</sup>

In fact, modernism renewed itself as an experimental movement after the war, generating formal innovations in every field. Pace Howe’s account of literary belatedness, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, and Saul Bellow’s *Adventures of Augie March* combined exuberant Joycean wordplay with a delight in the vernacular that marked the emergence of a vigorous modern American fiction. The new poetry movements that emerged in San Francisco, New York, and Black Mountain likewise anchored the written word in vernacular speech, which they joined to a performance style that mimicked bebop improvisation. More significantly, the late 1940s and 1950s witnessed an explosion of nonrepresentational work in the visual arts that caught the world’s attention, most notably in the bold abstract paintings of Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Clyfford Still, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Joan Mitchell, Lee Krasner, Norman Lewis, and other artists loosely grouped under the rubric of “Abstract Expressionists.” The vitality of the visual arts in turn energized new approaches in other fields. A reflexive, self-critical modernism took form in the work of John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Charles Olson, Frank O’Hara, Judith

Malina and Julian Beck, Anna Halprin, Yvonne Rainer, Louis Kahn, Allan Kaprow, and other postwar innovators.

It has become common to divide the history of the arts in the postwar period in half, with the Abstract Expressionists who came of age in the 1940s representing a “high modernism” as against a neo-Dada movement that emerged in the 1950s with figures like Cage, O’Hara, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns launching a post-modern rebuke of the modern tradition. That stark division does damage to the history of the years between 1948 and 1963, when members of both groups mingled, shared their work and ideas, argued and exhibited in the same spaces. A Kline painting hung opposite a Rauschenberg painting in the dining hall at Black Mountain during what was arguably the first “Happening.” Cage lectured on Zen to an audience at the New York Eighth Street Club composed mostly of Abstract Expressionists. O’Hara and other “New York School” poets gave their first readings there. There was, furthermore, a continuous line of artistic experiment that led from the late 1940s into the 1960s and beyond, producing a *new modernism* as distinct from “late” or “post-modernism.” Everyone turned their attention to Pollock, whose enormous abstract paintings and physical presence inspired artists in virtually every field. Cunningham summoned Pollock’s example in explaining how he and Cage created performances in which music and dance were both “separate and interdependent.” “With the paintings of Jackson Pollock the eye can go any place on the canvas,” he told an interviewer. “No one point is more important than another. No point necessarily leads to another.”<sup>4</sup>

The new modernists roughly followed a similar course from the late 1940s forward, building outward from a disciplined analysis of the formal elements of their respective media to a critical engagement with the world. Many began with acts of historical recuperation, recovering the promise of early modernism to break the ossification of the movement. They called on the legacy of poet William Carlos Williams, composer Erik Satie, Dada artist Marcel Duchamp, and dancer Isadora Duncan—members of the generation of 1913, the year of the Armory Show, *Rite of Spring*, and Marcel Proust’s *Swann’s Way*—for a modernism that emphasized process over the creation of art objects, the disassembly and reassembly of distinct media, and a new fluid relationship between art and its audience. And they returned to the body as the wellspring of artistic practice, imbuing all genres with a muscular performative impulse. “Art does not seek to describe but to enact,” the poet Charles Olson announced in a 1951 manifesto, and that enactment involved physical performance, activation of audience response, and engagement with the everyday.<sup>5</sup> While the political implications of such a stance were often



muted, the new modernism promoted an aesthetic and ethic of relationality that served many artists as a critique of liberal individualism and modern social hierarchy. An art of formal relationships heightened consciousness of one's relationship to others—of the shifting boundaries between the body, the self, and society—promising a new way of being in the world. Far from coming “too late,” postwar modernists knew they were enacting something profoundly new and floored the accelerator at war's end. Those who were paying attention could see the acceleration beginning in 1948.

### An Art Out of Bounds

*Number 1, 1948* may not be the most successfully executed of Jackson Pollock's paintings—*Autumn Rhythm*, *Lavender Mist*, and other works he produced in the following two years have a claim to that distinction—but it is arguably the most challenging and confrontational of the large “all-over” canvasses he produced between 1947 and 1950.<sup>6</sup> No other painting responded with such ferocity, technical precision, and sheer analytical force to the condition of “modernity,” the exhilaration and terror of life lived with the knowledge that there is “nothing outside of the flux,” as William James put it in 1907.<sup>7</sup> Modernist writers and artists had since the late nineteenth century abandoned conventional forms of representation they found not only inadequate to conveying modern experience but profoundly false to that experience. In the early and mid-1940s many American modernists shared the ambitions of intellectuals who sought a stable ground for belief, a place of psychic integration, or an epistemological center from which to grasp a world in flux; but the most daring gave up that search and denied their audiences the consolations of legibility and closure. The affirmation of liberation from traditional constraints that enabled breathtaking formal experiments coexisted with an ethic of refusal. Pollock's contemporary Robert Motherwell wrote in 1949, “Aesthetic decisions in the process of painting are not primarily aesthetic in origin but moral, and nowadays largely negative.”<sup>8</sup>

Pollock's most abstract works during the years 1947 to 1950 are remarkable for their “abandonment of an image in favor of a dispersed, omnidirectional network of incident,” in Kirk Varnedoe's words.<sup>9</sup> As familiar as these works have become, one is still struck by what T. J. Clark calls “their fierce, almost doctrinaire quality, their quality of renunciation.” Despite the promise of unity—of “One-ness”—implicit in its title, *Number 1, 1948* deliberately frustrates a singular reading as it scatters the viewer's attention across its 5'8" by 8'8" canvass. Black oil paint painted, dripped, and rubbed with

a rag into untreated canvas moves outward from the center into the corners in a shape vaguely reminiscent of a butterfly or moth; but spurts of additional black paint squirted from oil tubes, along with white and silver tendrils of enamel paint that Pollock threw from sticks in frantic swirls, disrupt that compositional strategy. Neither the dancelike rhythms nor vortex images that hold together other Pollocks are available here. Sprays of paint stop suddenly and turn back on themselves. Splotches of red, blue, and purple offer coloristic relief but give way to streams that lash the canvas only to arrive at another impasse. There is no easy way to unify such an image. Layers of paint create a taut surface tension without a foreground or background, an interior or exterior. Stretches of canvas remain largely untouched, suggesting a work still in the making. Here one sees more clearly than in any other of his paintings the contending claims of “totality” and “annihilation” that Clark identifies with the most strenuous abstract art.<sup>10</sup>

What is powerfully evident is the work of the artist himself, in the muscular movement the viewer senses in the trails of paint flung across the canvas and—most obviously—in the handprints pressed onto the upper right of the canvass as a kind of second signature. The critic Meyer Schapiro may have had those handprints in mind when he wrote in 1957 of the “freely made” nature of abstract art as “a means of affirming the individual” in the face of “standardized objects” of only “passing and instrumental value.”<sup>11</sup> Or perhaps Pollock was asserting the will-to-creation he associated with Native American shamanism and other “primitive” artistic practices. Handprints appear in the earliest known cave paintings, seeming confirmation of Barnett Newman’s pronouncement that “The First Man Was an Artist.” “The artistic act,” Newman wrote, “is man’s personal birthright.”<sup>12</sup> The handprints may have been Pollock’s claim to that birthright, a proud display of his mastery of such primal powers.

Yet like the painting as a whole, the handprints resist any singular reading. They are after all not representations of Pollock’s hands, but smudges made by his paint-covered hands pressed to the canvass itself. They are marks *left*, not marks made in the manner of traditional figurative art. Moreover, they seem as much signs of desperation as of mastery, evidence left on the canvas by an artist struggling to escape entanglement or, worse, annihilation. The artist as subject disappears in the flux of modernity, as does the viewer herself. For this is a painting that allows no single point of entry, that deliberately impedes any unifying frame of vision encompassing the work as a whole, and which as a result disrupts the dream of optical command that had shaped Western art since the Renaissance. *Number 1, 1948* confounds the “I” as well as the eye. With Rimbaud, Pollock declares: “I is another.”

Pollock's exploration of subjectivity had been the driving force behind his work since the early 1940s, reflecting not only the interest he shared with other Abstract Expressionists in representing the unconscious but also his troubled emotional life. Born in 1912 in Cody, Wyoming—a tract development named for investor “Buffalo Bill” Cody—Pollock and his family moved multiple times, to Arizona and northern and southern California. A rebellious adolescent spirit and early exposure to leftist politics made him an unruly student who decided in 1930 to follow an older brother to New York and pursue an artistic career. Before he did, Pollock drove to Pomona College to see the newly installed mural *Prometheus* by Jose Clemente Orozco, which fed an interest in the Mexican muralists who combined modernist figuration, Cubist spatial dynamics, and native elements in radical public art. The murals of Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros remained abiding influences. When Siqueiros came to New York in 1936 to make large agitprop images for a May Day parade, Pollock joined his workshop and learned the new brushless techniques for industrial paints Siqueiros was exploring as an alternative to working with oils. Equally important was his experience with the American scene painter Thomas Hart Benton, his teacher at New York's Art Students League, with whom Pollock established a close personal relationship. Although he later claimed Benton's regionalist aesthetic only gave him “something against which to react very strongly,” Benton's murals left an imprint in the vigorous rhythmic composition and fascination with the vast American landscape that remained elements of Pollock's mature style.<sup>13</sup> A job at the Federal Arts Project kept him afloat, but emotional turmoil and a souring on social realism amid the collapse of the Popular Front led him to an interest in the depiction of psychological states through supposedly “primitive” or archaic symbols. Hieroglyphics, calligraphy, and totemic images drawn from Native American art offered a visual language combining thought and sign without illusionistic representation.

Pollock's alcoholism, recurrent depressive episodes, and unruly, often violent, behavior sent him into three protracted periods of analysis between 1937 and 1943 and even a brief hospitalization. The artwork he created during treatment reflected the influence of his Jungian psychiatrists, who urged him to work through the dualistic archetypes Jung identified with the “collective unconscious” as a pathway to psychic integration. Pollock found reinforcement for that quest in other sources: the writings of essayist John Graham on primitive art and modernism; the Surrealists' experiments with unmediated “automatic” writing and painting; and, especially, the 1941 exhibition of *Indian Art of the United States* at the Museum of Modern Art, where he witnessed Native Americans creating images by dropping

colored sand from their hands.<sup>14</sup> The new work that emerged in the early and mid-1940s—*The Moon Woman*, *Male and Female*, *The She-Wolf*, and other paintings—marked a psychological turn that involved a symbolic reimagining of the self. If such work invoked the “timeless” elements of human experience, in contrast to the historicism of the 1930s social realism, it was nonetheless highly conscious of its historical situation and in its own way a radical response to the catastrophic events of the 1940s.<sup>15</sup> Picasso’s antiwar masterpiece *Guernica* remained a touchstone, even as Pollock moved farther and farther away from representational work, and Pollock himself was a socialist until the end.

The challenge for Pollock and other members of his generation, according to Michael Leja, was “how to make paintings that *looked like* the product of a fragmented, divided, complex self.”<sup>16</sup> Although Pollock is best known for the entirely abstract paintings he made between 1947 and 1950, his response to that challenge involved an ongoing struggle with the human figure. His friend the poet Frank O’Hara wrote that “the crisis of figurative as opposed to non-figurative art pursued him throughout his life,” and when human figures reappeared in his late work they did so on the other side of that crisis, as if Pollock could only retrieve the human subject after relinquishing the dream of an integrated self.<sup>17</sup> Figuration returned as “a ghostly presence,” in Leja’s words, in the abstracted silhouettes of his “cut-out” works of 1948 to 1950.<sup>18</sup> The handprints of *Number 1, 1948* were themselves a ghostly presence that emerged from the skeins of paint exploding across the canvas.

Pollock’s assault on the idea of a unified subject at work in the creation and reception of abstract painting eluded his greatest champion, the art critic Clement Greenberg. Greenberg had established his credentials as a theorist of modernism at age thirty in a career-making 1939 essay for *Partisan Review*, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” and was soon a regular in its pages, as well as art critic for the *Nation*. In that essay Greenberg located the emergence of the avant-garde in the wreckage of revolutionary movements after 1848 and the refusal of the triumphant bourgeoisie to support challenging art. “To keep culture *moving* in the midst of ideological confusion and violence” meant “retiring from public altogether” and turning to the inner workings of specific media. “Content is to be dissolved so completely into form,” Greenberg wrote of the guiding premises of early modernism, “that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself.”<sup>19</sup>

Greenberg quickly jettisoned the Marxist apparatus of “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” for a Kantian defense of artistic autonomy, but a progressive view of history—of “culture *moving*”—remained a leitmotiv of all his work. Modernism advanced through a dynamic of self-criticism and self-purification.

“The history of avant-garde painting is that of a progressive surrender to the resistance of its medium,” he wrote a year later, “which resistance consists chiefly in the flat picture plane’s denial of efforts to ‘hole through’ it for realistic perspectival space.”<sup>20</sup> Although he claimed to be writing a historical account of modernism, not prescriptive criticism, the message was clear. The most advanced modern painting disavowed illusion, narrative content, or any other concerns beyond its irreducibly flat surface. As Greenberg wrote in 1960, in the fullest statement of his position: “The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.”<sup>21</sup>

Fitting Pollock into this scheme took some work. Greenberg recognized Pollock’s talent as early as 1943, when he saw the mammoth mural Pollock created for Peggy Guggenheim’s apartment, and he heralded him as the finest painter of his generation. The two men established a friendly, if often tense, relationship: each needed the other to establish his reputation. But Greenberg was never entirely uncritical in his assessments and was especially uneasy with the “Gothic-ness”—the traces of Surrealism and Jung, the mythological constructs—he saw in Pollock’s work in the mid-1940s. He called for the creation of a “bland, large, balanced, Apollonian art” that substituted “intense detachment” for “passion.” “We have had enough of the wild artist,” Greenberg announced. “The task facing culture in America is to create a *milieu* that will produce such an art—and literature—and free us (at last!) from the obsession with extreme situations and states of mind.”<sup>22</sup> His praise for Pollock in later years focused exclusively on his formal achievements.

If anyone failed to conform to the ideal of the “Apollonian” artist—at least in the public’s mind—it was Pollock, who by the late 1940s achieved celebrity status as a tough, brooding paragon of masculine energy. *Life* magazine ran a somewhat mocking article in its August 8, 1949, issue that asked, “Jackson Pollock: Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?” Pollock showed up at the photo shoot without the foppish tweedy attire he once sported in New York bars, dressed instead in the rolled-up blue jeans and paint-splattered work shirt he wore in his studio at his Long Island home. Standing in front of *Summertime: Number 9A, 1948*, he stared confidently into the camera with his arms and legs crossed, cigarette hanging from his mouth, as if he were the brother of the Stanley Kowalski character Marlon Brando had played on Broadway in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The image of Pollock as tormented genius was confirmed for many with his death in an alcoholic car crash in August 1956, which recalled James Dean’s fatal crash the year before. Sale prices for his work spiked immediately after his death.

Pollock hated his reputation as a wild, out-of-control artist who threw paint at canvases with frenzied abandon. He rightly insisted on his disciplined control of the medium: there were “no accidents” in his work. Yet there was one element of his persona that conformed to his actual practice. More than anything else, the photographs and film German émigré Hans Namuth made of Pollock at work established his physical movement as a central element of his creative process, confirming Pollock’s own account of his approach. A man of few words, Pollock wrote a brief statement in 1947 that registered the psychological and physical intensity he brought to his work. “On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from four sides and literally be *in* the painting.”<sup>23</sup> Namuth marveled at Pollock’s “dance-like movement” as he photographed him reworking one of his largest paintings, *One: Number 30, 1950*.<sup>24</sup> It is likely that more Americans knew Namuth’s photographs than they did Pollock’s paintings themselves. In the years after Pollock’s death, the images Namuth made of the artist moving in and around his paintings would captivate dancers and performance artists alike. Pollock’s body was the medium between his anguished inner state and the canvases that dwarfed the bodies of viewers.

Pollock was the likely inspiration for Harold Rosenberg’s famous 1952 essay “The American Action Painters,” which hailed New York artists who approached the canvas “as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or ‘express’ an object, actual or imagined.”<sup>25</sup> Although the term failed to describe the work of many of the Abstract Expressionists (notably Rothko, among others), “Action Painting” immediately took hold as a catchphrase for the movement, resonant with the new modernists’ idea of art as enactment. Rosenberg and Greenberg vied for position as the leading critic of Abstract Expressionism. But the most penetrating assessment of Pollock’s work came from the aspiring painter and critic Allan Kaprow, whose eulogy, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” appeared in 1958. Born in 1927, Kaprow came to his subject with a background in philosophy and art history, as well as training with the émigré artist Hans Hofmann, whose lectures influenced many Abstract Expressionists and even Greenberg himself. In 1948 or 1949, Kaprow read John Dewey’s 1934 work on aesthetics, *Art as Experience*. Dewey’s effort to establish “the continuity of esthetic experience with normal processes of living” became Kaprow’s own life-long quest, inspiring the Happenings he later organized as participatory processes of art making. Dewey had rejected “the museum conception of art” as part of a larger critique of aesthetic theories that isolated the art object from the social field. Aesthetic experience was embedded in the practical life

of a community, in his view, with audiences as involved as artists in establishing the meaning of art. “The product of artistic activity is significantly called the *work* of art,” Dewey wrote; audiences were active interpreters, they were doing art *work*. A shared process of meaning making, aesthetic experience prefigured a society of free communication in which citizens could make art, live life as art, indeed remake themselves as works of art. The goal of art making was not about making objects: it was about making new human beings. “The self is created in the creation of objects.”<sup>26</sup>

Though he never mentioned him by name, Kaprow approached Pollock with Dewey’s vision in mind. Pollock’s greatest achievement as a painter, in Kaprow’s view, was to free artists from painting itself. Pollock “created some magnificent paintings,” Kaprow wrote. “But he also destroyed painting.” His huge “all-over” drip paintings were more about physical movement, “diaristic gesture,” and ritual than paint on a canvass. There was no single point of entry into Pollock’s paintings, and no way of ignoring his presence once absorbed by them. The viewer followed the energy of paint flung across and beyond the canvass. “What we have, then, is art that tends to lose itself out of bounds, tends to fill our world with itself,” Kaprow argued.<sup>27</sup> From this perspective, the paint that covered Pollock’s clothes and splattered over the floor of his studio was every bit as important as the paint that landed on the canvas (and perhaps more so).

An art “out of bounds” demanded that viewers be “acrobats” moving constantly between “identification with the hands and body that flung the paint and stood ‘in’ the canvas and submission to the objective markings, allowing them to entangle and assault us.” Kaprow saw more keenly than any other critic how Pollock had assaulted the autonomous subject, and the consequences of that assault for the viewer and art making itself. To speak of his paintings in terms of flatness or purity was entirely mistaken; likewise a view of his work as heroic self-assertion ignored the “(perhaps) Zen quality of Pollock’s personality.” “The artist, the spectator, and the outer world are much too interchangeably involved here.” In taking abstraction to its limits, Pollock had let loose a transfiguring aesthetic imagination that promised to remake the self in relationship to others and opened art to the materiality of the world. “Pollock, as I see him, left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life,” Kaprow wrote, “either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if need be, the vastness of Forty-second Street.” It was there artists would find the materials for a “new concrete art.” “All of life will be open to them,” Kaprow predicted. “They will discover out of ordinary things the meaning of ordinariness.”<sup>28</sup>

## A Poetics of Performance

The disputes over the meaning and consequences of modern art that trailed Pollock's work roiled virtually every other aspect of the arts at midcentury, often provoking a fight over the legacy of early modernism as a resource for the present. In literary circles that fight took place initially on the terrain of criticism. The American New Critics—John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, and other advocates of “close reading”—sought a mode of literary analysis that would preserve the integrity of poetic texts from reductionist readings while also advancing a traditionalist critique of modern society. The group helped establish literary criticism as an academic field, publishing textbooks such as the Brooks-Warren volume, *Understanding Poetry*, which in multiple editions became a staple of undergraduate English courses, and launching journals such as the *Kenyon Review* and the *Sewanee Review*. In 1948 Ransom established the Kenyon School of English, a summer institute that brought graduate students and young faculty to Kenyon College to study with leading critics; a year later R. P. Blackmur, a sometimes member of the New Critics group, founded the Princeton Seminars in Literary Criticism.<sup>29</sup> Poetry was at the heart of these enterprises, and in particular the poetry of John Donne and the seventeenth-century English Metaphysical school that the New Critics read through the lens of T. S. Eliot's lament about the “dissociation of sensibility” in a secularized modern world.

Many who embraced the approach—and many who rejected it—understood the New Criticism as simply a technique for reading challenging poetic works, yet the movement aspired to more than methodology. In a 1959 lecture, Blackmur summarized the assumptions that held the group together: “They believe in the absolute sovereignty of poetry, in the distrust of rationality as the cumulus and discrimination of skills, and have a tendency to make the analyzable features of the forms and techniques of poetry the equivalent of its content.”<sup>30</sup> The New Critics turned to the density of modern poetic form as a source of truth that resisted the instrumental tendencies of a scientific culture.

Ironically the English critics who first promoted the idea of “close reading” of texts, William Empson and I. A. Richards, had identified their project with modern science and a vaguely pragmatist idea of reading as a tool for cultural transformation. Richards's *Practical Criticism* (1929) explicitly rejected the Kantian ideal of aesthetic autonomy and emphasized the reception and social uses of literature.<sup>31</sup> The American New Critics had no use for questions of audience and reception, however; they insisted on



the self-sufficiency of the text as a site of aesthetic value for the individual reader. What they retained from Empson and Richards was a resolute refusal to read literature as a didactic moral or ideological lesson, to reduce poetry to what Brooks called “prose-sense”—“a rack on which the stuff of the poem is hung.” The New Critics waged a multifront war against “the heresy of paraphrase,” the “intentionalist fallacy,” and historicist approaches Brooks derided for making “the poetry of the past . . . significant merely as cultural anthropology.” Close readings of Metaphysical and modernist poetry revealed a drama of ambiguities and tensions—a balancing of “items intrinsically beautiful or ugly, attractive or repulsive” in the form and structure of the work itself—that, when successful, resolved themselves in a nonintellectualized fusion of thought and emotion.<sup>32</sup> Read properly, such poetry provided its own unity—a psychic and aesthetic centering of experience rescued from social and historical conditioning.

The announcement in February 1949 that the Library of Congress had awarded the first Bollingen Prize for poetry to Ezra Pound for his *Pisan Cantos* put New Criticism to the test. At the time of the award, Pound was confined for insanity in St. Elizabeth Hospital in Washington, having escaped a conviction for treason for his radio broadcasts in support of the Mussolini regime during World War II. The announcement prompted criticism in the popular press and more specialized publications, including the *Partisan Review*, which had since the 1930s defended modernism against political attacks from the Left. For those who weighed in, the issue at stake was less Pound’s wartime activities than how to assess his formal achievement as a modern poet in light of the fascist and anti-Semitic strains that ran through his work. The presence of leading members of the New Critics group on the prize committee, most notably Tate, Warren, and Eliot himself, made the Pound Bollingen award the occasion for a fierce debate about the politics of literary criticism, and of the modernist movement itself.<sup>33</sup>

The Bollingen jury’s statement set the terms of the controversy.

The fellows are aware that objections may be made to awarding a prize to a man situated as is Mr. Pound. In their view, however, the possibility of such objection did not alter their responsibility assumed by the Jury of Selection. This was to make a choice for the award among the eligible books, provided any one merited such recognition, according to the stated terms of the Bollingen Prize. To permit other considerations than that of poetic achievement to sway the decision would destroy the significance of the award and would in principle deny the validity of that objective perception of value on which civilized society must rest.<sup>34</sup>

Tate followed up, defending the decision in even more starkly formalist terms: "Pound's language remains our primary concern. If he were a convicted traitor, I should still think that . . . he had performed an indispensable duty to society."<sup>35</sup>

The Bollingen debate did not divide along conventional political lines: the radical Dwight Macdonald sided with Tate in support of the prize for Pound, while the conservative Peter Viereck joined the socialist Irving Howe in criticizing the jury's decision. Opponents of the award zeroed in on the influence of the New Criticism on the jury. William Barrett blasted a critical movement "which is so obsessed with formal and technical questions than it has time only for a glimpse at content."<sup>36</sup> Clement Greenberg wrote "As a Jew, I myself cannot help being offended by the matter of Pound's latest poetry; and since 1943 things like that make me *physically* afraid too." And surprisingly, Greenberg declared himself "sick of the art-adoration that prevails among cultured people."<sup>37</sup> Viereck made the most vigorous statement of this position, insisting that the *Cantos* "proclaim the same fascism and racism which Pound preached over Mussolini's radio." Debate over modern poetry had in his view deadlocked between philistinism and "crossword-puzzle poetry, which, whatever its fascination would kill poetry by scaring away its audience." In their formalism, Tate and other members of "the Pound-Eliot school" had not only abandoned their moral responsibility as cultural critics, Viereck maintained, they had "Alexandrianized and Babbitized this work . . . into a supreme bore. They have turned the vital and original revolt of 1913 and the 1920s into a New Academy, today's most baneful block to vitality and originality."<sup>38</sup>

Most opponents cast the New Critics as formalists pure and simple, ignoring the conservative critique of modernity they shared with Eliot and Pound himself.<sup>39</sup> Tate and Ransom had been members of the Southern Agrarian circle that produced *I'll Take My Stand*, the 1930 collection that upheld the supposedly "organic," religiously grounded culture of the white Old South against a Northern "industrial" ideology of individualism, scientism, and liberal progressivism. By the late 1930s the Agrarian circle had dispersed, and Tate and Ransom had given up whatever hope they once had for an Agrarian political program. But the longing for a premodern Christian metaphysics and hierarchical social order remained, with the "organic" transferred from the social realm to poetics. In Eliot, the New Critics found a poet whose formal complexity resisted the reduction of language to information, and who shared their own animus against a culture that celebrated self-expression even as it subordinated subjective experience to science. Their reading of

Donne and his contemporaries was as much a vindication of Eliotic modernism as it was a statement about the power of the Metaphysical poets themselves. “The literature of the past lives in the literature of the present and nowhere else,” Tate wrote; “it is all present literature.”<sup>40</sup>

The group’s cultural traditionalism underwrote their approach to the text but also pushed beyond the text itself. As Gerald Graff has argued, the New Criticism was divided between its insistence on the self-sufficiency of literature and its aspiration to “experience,” an ineffable category that its practitioners located in a textual fusion of opposites but seemed ultimately to transcend literature itself.<sup>41</sup> The “true poem,” according to Brooks, “is a simulacrum of reality . . . by *being* an experience rather than any mere statement about experience or any mere abstraction from experience.”<sup>42</sup> The turn to the formal properties of the text bespoke a hunger for something more than the text: for presence, plenitude, and unmediated experience. Being, not the representation of being, was the reward of working through the dramatic balance of opposites in one of Donne’s sonnets or Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.

A younger generation of poets fiercely rejected the New Criticism as a new academicism—and the veneration of Eliot that came with it—but they too looked to poetry as a pathway to a more intense experience of reality. Donald M. Allen’s influential 1960 anthology, *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960*, mapped out the new terrain, identifying different groups that had emerged across the country after the war: the Black Mountain Poets led by Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, associated with Black Mountain College and the *Black Mountain Review*; the San Francisco Renaissance initiated by Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, Helen Adam, and others in the Bay Area; the Beat Generation identified with Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Gregory Corso, with considerable overlap with the Duncan group; the New York School of Frank O’Hara, Kenneth Koch, and John Ashberry; and others affiliated with more than one group, including LeRoi Jones, Denise Levertov, and Gary Snyder.<sup>43</sup> “The common element,” Ginsberg later recalled, “was interest in [William Carlos] Williams and the vernacular and idiom.” The new poets formed “a united front against the academic poets to promote a vernacular revolution in American poetry beginning with spoken idiom against academic official complicated metaphor that has a logical structure derived from the study of Dante.”<sup>44</sup> “We can get nothing from England,” Jones declared in opposition to the New Critics’ Anglophilia. “And the diluted formalism of the academy (the formal culture of the U.S.) is anaemic & fraught with incompetence & unreality.” What mattered is “HOW YOU SOUND???”<sup>45</sup>

Moving forward beyond the New Critics meant moving back to the years when modern poetry first broke through in the United States—to the Pound of the *Little Review* and, especially, to the example of Williams, whose localism and commitment to poetry “in the American grain” (the title of his 1925 work of cultural criticism) beckoned as an alternative to Eliot. Williams’s star had fallen since the 1920s, but in the years after the war younger writers read his work and literally beat a path to his door in Rutherford, New Jersey, where he had practiced medicine for decades. Williams reemerged as a historicist poet of American experience with the serial publication of his epic *Paterson* between 1946 and 1951, and he offered a declaration of his poetic principles in a 1948 lecture on “The Poem as a Field of Action” at the University of Washington. “Where else can what we are seeking arise from but speech? From speech, from American speech as distinct from English speech . . . from what we *hear* in America.” American poets should “seek profusion, the Mass—heterogeneous—ill-assorted,” if they were to depict “reality in a modern world that has seen more if not felt more than in the past—in order to be *able* to feel more.”<sup>46</sup>

A poetics of the “ill-assorted” vernacular promised to open the floodgates of intense feeling and raw experience for the new poets. Getting there involved a regrouping of poetic language in breath and the body, an alliance of the written word with the popular arts, and the performance of poetry as a means of creating new communities. Just as Kaprow had traced a path from Pollock’s flinging of paint to the “vastness of Forty-second Street,” the new poets moved outward from poetry as a physical art to an engagement with the world. Olson’s manifesto for open composition, “Projective Verse,” was the key text. “Verse now, 1950, if it is to go ahead, if it is to be of *essential* use,” he declared, “must, I take it, catch up and put into itself certain laws and possibilities of the breath, of the breathing of the man who writes as well as of his listenings.” Poetry as an “energy-discharge” was a projection of breath and speech that opened up the “field” of composition and created “a stance toward reality outside a poem as well as a new stance toward the reality of a poem itself.”<sup>47</sup> Olson discarded the self-sufficient poem for the projection of embodied speech to an audience craving experience in the raw. “Art does not seek to describe but to enact,” he declared a year later.<sup>48</sup>

The new poets’ enactments were deliberately messy, drawing on slang, the detritus of city life, and the slap-dash energy of “impure” genres like comic books and jazz performance. Robert Duncan sought “[in] one way or another to live in the swarm of human speech. This is not to seek perfection but to draw poetry or honey out of all things.”<sup>49</sup> The New York Poets collaborated with Abstract Expressionists in creating comics and collages,

wrote plays and made films. O'Hara was a curator at the Museum of Modern Art and produced its first catalogue on Pollock. Ashberry and Schuyler contributed to *Art News*, which championed the new abstract art. Just as Pollock dropped cigarettes, paint caps, sand, and glass into the layers of paint he dripped on the canvas, O'Hara wrote poems about Greta Garbo, Lana Turner, Billie Holiday, and the Pittsburgh Pirates. With "A Step Away from Them" (1956), O'Hara began his "I do this I do that" poems in which the iconography of modern flux ("the magazines of nudes/and the posters for BULLFIGHT and/the Manhattan Storage Warehouse") flashed through narratives of his New York life ("A glass of papaya juice / and back to work").<sup>50</sup>

Performance was central to the new poetics of enactment. Madeline Gleason helped launch the San Francisco Renaissance in the late 1940s with a series of poetry readings. Jack Spicer spoke for many in the San Francisco group when he said in 1949, "We must become singers, become entertainers" to conjure new poetic communities. "There is more of Orpheus in Sophie Tucker than in R.P. Blackmur, we have more to learn from George M. Cohan than from John Crowe Ransom."<sup>51</sup> He might well have added Charlie Parker—a favorite of the new poets and Abstract Expressionists alike—to the list. Parker and other bebop musicians had created a dense jazz modernism that eschewed the controlled orchestral arrangements of 1930s swing for a hard-charging experimental style, playing breathtaking improvisational riffs against the written score. Parker's virtuosic saxophone solo in "Ornithology" (1946) has, in Phil Ford's words, "a sense of being in its song structure without quite being of it." The tendency of such improvisation is to pull away from the song's logic even as it plows its pattern into listeners' minds, "to take an alternate path, to tell a different story: to *go out*."<sup>52</sup>

It is not surprising that Beat poets seeking to "go out" from poetry into the realm of raw experience emulated bebop performance style in their readings. The boppers' clothes, argot, drug use, and association with a black demi-monde of criminals and draft dodgers made them objects of white bohemians' primitivist fantasy. "The Negro jazz musician of the forties was *weird*," LeRoi Jones wrote, and Beats made the myth of that weirdness "a general alienation in which even white men could be included."<sup>53</sup> Ginsberg's 1955 reading of *Howl* at San Francisco's Sixth Gallery provoked his friend Jack Kerouac to chant, "Go! Go! Go!" as Ginsberg mourned "the best minds of my generation, destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked," then picked up speed to herald that generation with a cascade of lines beginning with the word *who*. The crowd cheered, electrified by Ginsberg's rhythmic incantation of homosexuality, drugs, and madness—a call-and-response enactment of the aesthetic of "excess" that historian George Cotkin identifies as a key element

of the midcentury avant-garde. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, owner of City Lights bookstore, telegraphed Ginsberg that night asking for the manuscript.<sup>54</sup> Soon Ferlinghetti was reading and recording his own poems with jazz accompaniment.

In the new poetry, American modernism again demonstrated the impulse to work through its medium to create art “out of bounds.” The turn to the vernacular that had led the younger generation from Eliot back to Williams, the reembodyment of poetry in breath and speech, and the celebration of urban heterogeneity in performances blurring the boundary between poetry and music created communities of fellow seekers after “experience”—the very word their adversaries the New Critics invoked as the reward of close reading. “We all thought *experience itself was good*,” the Beat poet Diane di Prima later recalled, “*any experience*.”<sup>55</sup>

### An Aesthetic of Relations

Ruth Asawa had come to Toluca, Mexico, in the summer of 1947 to teach art and health classes as part of a Quaker service program. By the time she left she had learned a new sculptural technique that would define her artistic practice in the late 1940s and 1950s. Women in Toluca taught Asawa how to crochet the baskets they used to carry eggs from the market using a single loop of wire. Returning to Black Mountain College, where she had enrolled as a student in 1946, Asawa moved from drawing, printmaking, and collage to sculpture. Working with wire often left her hands bleeding, but Asawa made copper, brass, and other metals into works of extraordinary delicacy. Wire baskets soon gave way to elaborate hanging pieces with bulbous shapes nestled inside other shapes that turned slowly in the breeze. Like a Möbius strip, each wire line moved from the exterior to form the interior of a shape and then turned back out again to form another. The primacy of line in the works elided the distinction between drawing and sculpture, while their transparency and seeming lightness made them as much elements of their surrounding environment as autonomous objects. As with so much of the new modernism, Asawa’s art moved outward from abstract form to the world beyond. “It’s an amazing technique,” she explained. “The shape comes out working with the wire. You don’t think ahead of time, *this is what I want*. You work on it as you go along. You make a line, then you go into space, and you have a three-dimensional piece. It’s like a drawing in space.”<sup>56</sup>

Asawa’s summer in Toluca was actually her second trip to Mexico. She had traveled with one of her sisters to Mexico City by Greyhound bus two years earlier, inspired by the work of the country’s muralists, and took a

course in fresco painting. On their way to Mexico, the bus stopped in Missouri, where they first encountered Jim Crow signs on bathrooms. “We didn’t know whether we should use the colored toilet or white toilet,” Asawa later told an interviewer. “And so at that time we decided to use the colored toilet because we were colored.”<sup>57</sup>

As a mature artist, Asawa would consistently resist efforts to define her work by its “Asianness,” but her early life was powerfully shaped by her experience as the daughter of Japanese immigrants and an internee during World War II. Born in California in 1926, Asawa was one of seven children who worked alongside their parents on a truck farm outside of Los Angeles while taking classes in Japanese language, calligraphy, and traditional Kendo fencing. After Pearl Harbor, FBI agents appeared at their door to take their father away, most likely because of his eminence within the local Japanese American community, but not before he burned the family’s collection of Japanese books, bamboo swords, and other artifacts. Soon Asawa, her siblings, and their mother were deported to the detention center at the Santa Anita racetrack and, after that, to the Rohwer camp in Arkansas. Asawa found a surprising number of artists among her fellow internees, including employees at the Disney studio; at Rohwer she took art classes where, in the absence of other materials, students fashioned sculptures out of tin cans and painted on pieces of cloth. A Quaker program to release Nisei to attend college allowed her to enroll in Milwaukee State College—the cheapest school she could find—in 1943 and study art education. But upon returning from her first trip to Mexico, Asawa learned that no school in Wisconsin would hire a Japanese American teacher. Rather than finish her degree, she applied to Black Mountain College, which she had heard of from American artists she met in Mexico.<sup>58</sup> In her application she explained she sought “better understanding of art & community living.”<sup>59</sup> She enrolled in the summer of 1946.

Asawa had come to the right place. Black Mountain was the brainchild of the iconoclastic classicist John Andrew Rice, who was fired from a tenured position at Rollins College in Florida in 1933 in a dispute over curricular changes. Other dissenting faculty left in protest, and together they identified a location in the mountains of western North Carolina and secured funding to launch an innovative liberal arts college with arts education at its center. With a loose governing structure, a faculty of devoted teachers, and a faith in progressive education, Black Mountain established itself from the outset as the site where Deweyan pragmatism and European modernism met. The Deweyan mantra of “learning by doing” converged with a modernist pedagogy derived from the German Bauhaus, which in the Weimar period had offered training in architecture, the visual arts, craft, and industrial design

in a social democratic program for educating new art workers. “Process,” “method,” and “experiment” became the watchwords of Black Mountain, with Rice following Dewey in seeing “art-experience” as central to civic education.<sup>60</sup> Dewey served on the school’s advisory board (along with Carl Jung, Albert Einstein, and other luminaries), and after visiting the college in 1935 wrote Rice with his endorsement: “The College exists at the very ‘grass roots’ of a democratic way of life.”<sup>61</sup> Factionalism roiled the faculty almost from the outset, the curriculum shifted with the departure and arrival of different teachers and visiting artists, and finances dwindled to the vanishing point by the time of its closing. Yet throughout, Black Mountain steadfastly maintained an aesthetic and ethic of *relations*—relations between theory and practice, expressive form and its environment, artists and audience, and between citizens. According to a 1952 statement of its “heretical” principles, “Black Mountain College carefully recognizes that, at this point, in man’s necessities, it is not things in themselves but what happens between things where the life of them is to be sought.”<sup>62</sup>

The roster of faculty, students, visiting artists, and critics who passed through Black Mountain between 1933 and 1957 still astonishes. Anni and Josef Albers, Charles Olson, M. C. Richards, Xanti Schawinsky, Stefan Wolpe, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller, Paul Goodman, Franz Kline, Elaine and Willem de Kooning, Clement Greenberg, Edward Dahlberg, Alfred Kazin, Eric Bentley, Jacob Lawrence, Robert Rauschenberg, Kenneth Noland, Cy Twombly, Ray Johnson, Karen Karnes, Aaron Siskind, Hazel Larsen Archer, and Asawa herself created an electric atmosphere of artistic innovation and debate unparalleled at any other institution. By the time Asawa arrived, Black Mountain stood on a former campsite anchored by two structures that symbolized the school’s commitments: a modest Arts-and-Crafts-style dining hall it had inherited from the previous owner, which also served as an auditorium for performances, and a new modernist Studies Building that housed studios and classrooms. Students and willing faculty worked a farm that provided most of the college’s foodstuffs, visitors lectured in the dormitory, dance lessons took place in the open air, and conversations among faculty and students continued from class to mealtime and beyond. Part liberal arts college, part arts colony, part utopian community, Black Mountain was the ideal place for twenty-year-old Asawa to learn about “art & community living.”

The most important teacher for Asawa—as for most students in its early years—was Josef Albers, who was Rice’s prime catch for the new college. Albers had taught the famed introductory course at the Bauhaus, with training in drawing, color, and design. After the school closed in 1933 in the



face of Nazi pressure, Josef and his wife, the weaver Anni Albers, looked for options abroad. On the advice of contacts at the Museum of Modern Art, Rice recruited Josef as the college's master art teacher. At a reception held upon the Alberses' arrival from Berlin in November 1933, Josef explained his approach in halting English: "I want to open eyes."<sup>63</sup>

Albers had no truck with the romantic image of the modern artist: art was not about "self-expression"; his students were not to speak of their feelings. Opening his students' eyes meant subjecting them to a disciplined study of objects, forms, and materials—and the relationships between them. He gave his students precise assignments using leaves, wood, paper, and other simple materials that they brought to class for critiques. His Basic Design course introduced students to what he called "mattière" and "material," the first focusing on the appearance and texture of materials, the latter on their capacities. "Every art work is based on a thinking out of the material," he explained.<sup>64</sup> The next step was for students to learn how juxtaposition and context redefined the viewer's experience of materials, form, and color. In his "figure-ground" lessons, Albers asked students about the checkerboard: Was it white on black or black on white? Which was the figure, which was the ground?<sup>65</sup>

Albers wanted students to see "which of certain art problems are related to our own life." He was an austere formalist, but his was a relational formalism animated by the belief that a disciplined vision would cut through conventional ways of seeing and being in the world. Art was an ethical practice that had as its goal a heightened sensitivity to one's social situation. "Art is a province in which one finds all the problems of life reflected—not only the problems of form," but also "problems of philosophy, of religion, of sociology, of economy."<sup>66</sup>

Asawa's wire sculptures bore the imprint of Albers's pedagogy in their attention to materiality and relational aesthetic. She recalled that she liked Albers's "rigid" classroom presence, which alienated many other students. "I wasn't very much with feeling because I had come from a culture that didn't think very much about one's feeling."<sup>67</sup> Albers's "figure-ground" assignments reminded her of the calligraphy lessons she had taken as a child. Although her parents were Buddhist practitioners, her first intellectual encounters with Buddhism and Taoism came in Albers's course. Her wire sculptures explored relativity, flux, transparency, the interpenetration of object and space. The bulbous sculptures she wove out of a single wire were solids and voids at the same time. Their openness allowed durable metal shapes to create ephemeral shadow forms, an effect intensified when several pieces were hung together. A viewer looked inside and out into the space she shared with the sculptures.

The result was a perceptual reshaping of the environment, with the viewer made aware of her location in that environment. Asawa later explained how the viewer “can see through” her sculptures. “You can show inside and outside, and inside and outside are connected. Everything is connected, continuous.”<sup>68</sup>

For Asawa and other postwar modernists, art became a way to explore the permeable boundaries between the body, self, and environment. Whether in Pollock’s handprints on *Number 1, 1948* or the retrieval of breath and oral performance in the new poetry, an emphasis on physicality propelled a relational art out into the world—and with it, an ideal of subjectivity forged in constant interaction with others. The informal community of New York artists and critics known as the Club discussed these issues from its founding in 1949 through the mid-1950s, meeting at a loft on East Eighth Street for lectures, panel discussions, poetry readings, and film screenings. In some respects a New York affiliate of Black Mountain, the Club held lectures by William Barrett on Heidegger, Martin Blucher on aesthetic philosophy, the writer and critic Paul Goodman on Gestalt therapy and the idea of the avant-garde, and John Cage on Zen, among other themes that explored the ways art promoted new relations between the self and its environment.<sup>69</sup> Goodman was the author of the theoretical section of *Gestalt Therapy*—the 1950 primer he wrote with Frederick Perls and Ralph F. Hefferline—and his lecture at the Club on “Psychology and the Artist” set the agenda for subsequent discussions of the issue. Updating Jamesian psychology, *Gestalt Therapy* depicted the self as a protean “boundary/contact” between the biological needs of the human organism and “environmental stimuli.” Self-development took place in “a field” where “social-cultural, animal, and physical factors interact”—a site of shifting perceptions and meanings akin to Albers’s “figure-ground.”<sup>70</sup>

For Goodman and others at the Club, art was an intervention in that field, a way of being in the world that put the artist in a new relation to the viewer and put the viewer in a new relation to herself and others. Club regular Barnett Newman spoke for the group’s aspirations in an interview: “I hope that my painting has the impact of giving someone, as it did me, the feeling of his totality, of his own separateness, *and at the same time* of his connection to others, who are also separate.”<sup>71</sup> Asawa never set foot in the Club’s loft, but she had similar hopes for her wire sculpture. “It’s the same thing that you don’t change a person’s personality,” she explained, “but when you combine them with other people, with other personalities, they take on another quality. But the intent is not to change them, but to bring out another part of them.”<sup>72</sup>

The “boundary/contact” Asawa occupied was more treacherous territory than the one Newman occupied, however. Although she pushed back at

racialized readings of her work, she was keenly aware of her position as one of a handful of “colored” students and faculty at Black Mountain and bore the memory of her internment during the war. By the winter of 1948 she had embraced a universal humanism transcending race and nationality. She wrote her fellow student and future husband Albert Lanier that she was a “citizen of the universe.” “I no longer identify myself as a Japanese or American,” she told him. “I no longer want to nurse such wounds; I now want to wrap my fingers cut by aluminum shavings, and hands scratched by wire. Only these two things produce tolerable pains.”<sup>73</sup>

The road to that universal identity went through the body, but in Asawa’s case that meant the body of the simple organisms she studied in her biology class at Black Mountain. The egglike shapes of her early wire works evoked images of starfish and jellyfish she encountered in her textbook, the 1935 *Invertebrata*. The process of cellular reproduction—of mitosis—especially intrigued her: the drawings and ever-more elaborate sculptures she created nestled eggs within eggs. As Jason Richard Vartikar writes, “Asawa’s sculpture could represent the kernel of a ‘biological universalism’: that all life forms are constituted by divided cells, billions of twins which unite all plants and animals, and all the ‘races’ of humanity in a web of equivalency.”<sup>74</sup>

The photographs her friend Imogen Cunningham made in the 1950s of Asawa posing with her work underscored the artist’s biological imagination. Just as Namuth’s photographs defined Pollock’s physical activity as an athletic male dancer, Cunningham’s strikingly gendered portraits of Asawa showed her surrounded by womblike shapes. In one photograph Asawa wraps her sculptures around herself as if enveloped by the egg sacs she had created. She was as much “in” her work as Pollock, but in her case that meant occupying a generative space of cellular reproduction. Like her wire-meshed sculptures, Asawa was “inside and outside” at the same time.<sup>75</sup>

### Multiple Centers

Black Mountain was as much a laboratory for new approaches to performance as it was a site for making visual art or writing poetry that enacted relationships between the body, the work of art, and the audience. Modernists had long sought to create performances that synthesized different genres of expression in a coherent whole, most notably in the field of dance. Martha Graham’s 1943 *Appalachian Spring* epitomized the approach, with dance performed in sculptor Isamu Noguchi’s set to the strains of Aaron Copland’s folk-classical score. Other Graham pieces explored mythological themes as she integrated movement, music, and set design into narratives drawn from

ancient Greek literature. The Broadway and Hollywood productions of *West Side Story* (1957, 1961) followed the same logic, weaving a jazzy score, song, dance, narrative, set design, and costuming into an enormously popular drama of immigration, ethnic conflict, youth culture, and fights over urban space at midcentury. Black Mountain artists cracked that centering project wide open, asserting the distinct nature of each medium, and then reassembling them in ways meant to activate the attention of their audiences. It was not the difference between things that mattered, the composer John Cage wrote, “but rather their uniqueness and their infinite play of interpenetration with themselves and with us.”<sup>76</sup> The aesthetic of “interpenetration” quickly radiated throughout the world of dance and theater with works that broke through the “fourth wall” separating performance from “real life.” Visual artists followed suit with Happenings, environmental works and performance pieces of their own.

The catalyst for the new approach was Cage’s arrival at Black Mountain in the summer of 1948 with his partner, the dancer Merce Cunningham. At the time neither Cage nor Cunningham had achieved much visibility in their respective fields. Their stays at the college’s Summer Institute that year, and again in 1952, allowed them to undertake the work that would define their subsequent careers. Cage was a charismatic but controversial presence who advanced an approach to artistic experimentation at odds with the Bauhaus principles that had defined the college’s original curriculum. Every bit as disciplined as Albers, he carefully created chance protocols to generate uncertain outcomes. Cage understood experimentation as a “purpose to remove purpose.”<sup>77</sup> In contrast to the integrative aspirations of the original Bauhaus, with its progressive vision of a unified artistic praxis, he and Cunningham tore their respective genres apart and set them in motion as parallel but independent performances that often took an improvisational form.

Just as the new poets retrieved William Carlos Williams for a modernist tradition independent of Eliot, Cage reached back to the early twentieth-century French composer Erik Satie for a musical alternative to the twelve-tone method of his former teacher Arnold Schoenberg. Indeed, Satie became the guiding light for much of what took place at Black Mountain in the summer of 1948. Cage performed twenty-five half-hour concerts of Satie’s pieces on the dining hall piano. Poet M. C. Richards translated Satie’s 1913 play *The Ruse of Medusa* for a performance that featured Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller, and regular Black Mountain faculty. Satie’s fractured, slapstick narrative included a “Monkey Dance” sequence performed by Cunningham that seemed to have no relation to the rest of the work. The appeal of the play for Cage lay in its “incongruence between language (musical,

virtual, notational, etc.) and meaning.”<sup>78</sup> His most controversial act that summer was the polemical lecture he delivered in “Defense of Satie,” which divided faculty and students with its fierce denunciation of the entire harmonic tradition since Beethoven. Beethoven, Cage declared “immediately and unequivocally,” was in error in defining the structure of composition by harmony, “and his influence . . . has been deadening to the art of music.” What Satie (and Anton Webern) had done by contrast was to return music to its elemental components, time units. “There can be no right making of music that does not structure itself from the very roots of sound and silence—lengths of time.”<sup>79</sup> By giving up on harmonic synthesis, Satie had opened music to ambient sounds, to music of all types, to dissonance and silence itself. Ten years later Cage wrote in an imaginary conversation with the composer that “to be interested in Satie one must be disinterested to begin with, accept that a sound is a sound, a man is a man, giving up illusions about ideas of order, expressions of sentiment, and all the rest of our inherited claptrap.”<sup>80</sup>

Time lengths became the organizing principle for Cage’s compositions and collaborations with Cunningham from that point forward. Cunningham arrived at Black Mountain already a renegade from Graham’s version of modern dance. His final solo performance as a member of Graham’s company in 1944 was a declaration of independence. He shocked the audience by freeing his movements from her mythic narratives and the balletic tradition in which he had trained. A Black Mountain student immediately saw the novelty in his approach, writing that Cunningham was interested in “movement in time, not poses.”<sup>81</sup> “For me,” Cunningham explained later, “the subject of dance is dancing itself. It is not meant to represent something else, whether psychological, literary or aesthetic. It relates more to everyday experience, daily life, watching people as they move in the streets.”<sup>82</sup> Collaborating with Cage allowed him to go further, as the two men created pieces joined only by time durations that Cage determined by chance. Music did not provide accents to Cunningham’s movements, and Cunningham did not dance to—or with—its rhythms. Returning to Black Mountain in the summers of 1952 and 1953, Cunningham danced in a strenuous, seemingly improvisational style that conveyed the energy of an Abstract Expressionist painting. Hazel Larsen Archer’s photographs rendered a black-clad Cunningham as two-dimensional abstract form. One image caught his body in midflight, his head exceeding the picture frame, as if he were a stream of paint Pollock had flung across a canvas.

The decisions Cage and Cunningham made to strip music and dance of harmonic and narrative structure bore a superficial resemblance to the formalist aesthetics of Greenberg and the New Critics. But their insistence on

time and movement as the essence of their respective media was only the first step. Having uncoupled the strands that Graham and earlier modernists had woven together, they reassembled expressive genres in a dissonant aesthetic that forced audiences to forge their own connections and meanings. The strategy was at once comedic and confrontational. Satie's playful sensibility in his piano pieces and *Ruse of Medusa* appealed as an alternative to the high seriousness of Schoenberg and Graham. Cage's public persona was one of childlike wonder. In contrast to Pollock's furrowed brow, Cage came to be known for his beatific smile of acceptance. Under the influence of the Japanese essayist D. T. Suzuki, whose lectures Cage audited at Columbia, Cage adopted the koan and haiku form to disrupt conventional thinking through wordplay and seemingly nonsensical statements. Deadpan humor marked his delivery of lectures, most famously in the "Lecture on Nothing" he gave at the Club in February 1951, which began "I am here, and there is nothing to say."<sup>83</sup> He stepped in and out of his presentation, commenting on its format and coaxing his listeners to join him in finding "something" in the silences of his lecture. When he published the lecture several years later he rendered the text as a prose poem with empty spaces that indicated its timed structure and his pauses in speaking. In his lectures, the Deweyan pedagogy of "learning by doing" that infused Black Mountain merged with the substitution of performance for narrative he and Cunningham had undertaken at the college in 1948.<sup>84</sup>

Cage later wrote of his lectures and essays, "My intention has been, often, to say what I had to say in a way that would exemplify it; that would, conceivably, permit the listener to experience what I had to say rather than just hear about it."<sup>85</sup> Having an audience experience his ideas was at times less a matter of permission than sensory assault, however, at least in the case of the event Cage staged at Black Mountain in August 1952 that subsequently came to be known as *Theater Piece No. 1*, and which is regarded as the first of the Happenings that would later erupt as a major new genre in the early 1960s. No written record of Cage's plans for the piece survive—assuming they ever existed—and the memories of audience members and participants are hazy or contradictory. What everyone remembered was a multimedia event involving multiple participants who engaged in separate timed activities totaling forty-five minutes. Recollections were as disparate as the activities themselves: Perhaps Cage lectured on Meister Eckhart, or Zen, or read the Declaration of Independence; maybe Cunningham danced followed by a dog, or two; Olson and Richards may have recited poetry standing on a ladder; David Tudor performed at a toy piano, or a piano prepared as a percussive instrument; people remembered Robert Rauschenberg playing Edith Piaf

records at double speed in front of his all-white painting, which hung from the ceiling across from another painting by Franz Kline; someone projected slides or films on the walls of the dining hall. The confusion stemmed in part from Cage's arrangement of chairs in a square (or a circle?) divided by diagonal lines that disrupted the conventional proscenium view of theatrical performances while allowing Cunningham and other performers to move freely through the hall.<sup>86</sup> Depending on where one sat one saw and heard different activities, but never the entirety of the event.

There was a centering impulse in the piece, but it was different from the syncretic modernism Cage and Cunningham had rejected. Cage later recalled that the piece expressed "the centricity within each event and its non-dependence on other events."<sup>87</sup> And while some who saw the *Theater Piece No. 1* recalled a carnival atmosphere in keeping with Cage's expansive smile, the work registered the deliberately confrontational aesthetic he and other Black Mountain faculty admired in the writings of the French dramatist Antonin Artaud, which Richards had translated and circulated among the faculty. Just as Cage and Cunningham disavowed narrative and harmonic unity for the granular components of their genres, Artaud had in the 1930s railed against the tyranny of dialogue in drama and insisted on space as the defining element of theatrical performance. Artaud demanded a space "thundering with images and crammed with sounds" in an unremitting assault on audience passivity. Dialogue would give way to emotional incantations, the stage had to be eliminated so the audience would be consumed by a "living whirlwind" of spectacle. "It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that theater must be rebuilt."<sup>88</sup>

The dissonant aesthetic of Black Mountain had an electric effect on other artists determined to dissolve the boundary between performers and spectators. In her 1953 *People on a Slant*, choreographer Anna Halprin led dancers in ordinary clothes up a San Francisco incline as they performed simple tasks. Halprin, Trisha Brown, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer pioneered a dance of everyday life that moved back and forth between formal spaces to the open air and often including nonprofessionals.<sup>89</sup> They looked to Isadora Duncan—another member of the generation of 1913—as a forerunner of their spirited improvisations, as against Graham's mythic modernism. Cage and Cunningham were the conduits to Satie. Rainer's first completed dance was *Three Satie Spoons*, performed in 1961. A year later she and Trisha Brown performed *Satie for Two*. Perhaps unconsciously, Rainer—who attended Ginsberg's 1955 reading of *Howl*—made the connection between Black Mountain aesthetics and the new poetics when she recalled her initial impression of Forti's piece *See Saw*: "She made no effort to connect the events

thematically in any way. . . . And one thing followed another. Whenever I am in doubt I think of that. One thing follows another.”<sup>90</sup> Rainer’s 1963 *We Shall Run* began with twelve dancers standing as Berlioz’s *Requiem* played, before breaking into a seven-minute trot. She later recalled the artist Jasper Johns telling her the dance “had gone out to the outer limits on a scale of possibilities.”<sup>91</sup>

New York’s Living Theatre brought the spirit of Black Mountain to drama. Judith Malina and Julian Beck “incorporated” the company in 1948 with the hope of promoting a “poetic theater” and soon made a pilgrimage to New Jersey to ask William Carlos Williams if they could stage his *Many Loves*. Plays by Paul Goodman, Malina’s friend and therapist, became staples of their repertoire, with Goodman’s anarchism animating her hope that the theater would forge a new community out of the city’s political and artistic avant-gardes. Goodman wrote in a much-discussed 1951 essay that in an age of alienation art created for the “artist’s primary friends” could generate alternative forms of sociability and understanding. “The essential present-day advance guard is the physical reestablishment of community,” Goodman concluded, and Malina and Beck acted on that impulse.<sup>92</sup> Discrete activities—drama, dance, music, poetry readings, and political organizing—took place inside the Living Theatre’s building on Fourteenth Street, often colliding in Malina and Beck’s productions. In 1960 Cunningham moved his studio to the top floor. Beck wrote in his journal that same year, “I dream of a theatre company, of a company of actors that would stop imitating, but that would by creating a full view of the audience move that audience in such a way and imbue that audience with ideas and feelings that transformation and genuine transcendence can be achieved.”<sup>93</sup>

### An Architecture of “In-common-ness”

“Architecture deals with spaces,” Louis Kahn explained in a 1962 lecture; “it is the thoughtful and meaningful making of spaces, and those spaces should be of a nature where the structure of those spaces is apparent in the space itself.” Among the burgeoning ranks of architects who made the United States a center for modern architecture after the war, Kahn stands out for his searching revision of the modernist tradition. Beginning in the mid-1940s, he sought in “the thoughtful and meaningful making of spaces” a means of fostering communal belonging and civic identity. That search led him to design monumental architecture and city plans punctuated with landmarks—what he preferred to call “social marks, people-marks, life-marks.” Over the years such social concerns converged with Kahn’s poetic



sensibility and diffuse spirituality in works of profound beauty. The buildings Kahn designed in his fifties and sixties—the First Unitarian Church in Rochester (1959–1962), the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla (1959–1965), the National Assembly complex in Dhaka, Bangladesh (1962–1983), and the library at Philips Exeter Academy (1965–1972)—remain masterpieces of modern architecture. With these buildings Kahn created a new modernist vocabulary distinctly different from the “International Style” that held sway in the postwar United States and the neohistoricist “postmodernism” that followed.<sup>94</sup>

A designer of monumental architecture may seem an unlikely ally of the cohort of new modernists who gathered at Black Mountain, San Francisco poetry readings, and the Living Theatre. But Kahn’s massive assembly spaces bear the physical traces of the interest in process, materiality, bodily experience, and activation of individuals’ encounter with artworks that drove the postwar experiments in painting, poetry, dance, music, and theater. Moreover, Kahn shared his contemporaries’ reflexive approach to the modernist legacy he had inherited. He sought to retrieve and reorient the initial impulses of the modern movement in architecture and planning to challenge its canonization as a formal “style” identified with corporate power and, at the same time, respond to the atomization he and others associated with midcentury “mass society.” What Sarah Goldhagen calls Kahn’s “situated modernism” was itself a relational aesthetic with a powerful ethical impulse. As Kahn explained, architects and planners had the responsibility to help inhabitants recognize their “in-common-ness,” to create environments “where you and I become ‘thou’ instead of just I.”<sup>95</sup>

Born in Estonia as Leiser-Itze Schumlowsky—his name changed by parents aspiring to the higher status of German Jews—Kahn immigrated in 1906 at age five to Philadelphia, where he grew up in a series of tenement apartments in a struggling working-class neighborhood. Fortunate to have parents who, he later recalled, considered “art as a part of life, not something that’s attached to life in a peripheral way,” Kahn also benefited from the encouragement of teachers who recognized his talents and set him on his way to the University of Pennsylvania, then a bastion of traditionalist Beaux-Arts architecture. By the time he graduated in 1924, Kahn had imbibed the spirit of the modern movement, reinforced by a trip to Europe in 1928. He was especially drawn to the social modernism of the interwar years, inspired by the Bauhaus faculty in Germany and American advocates of public housing and urban planning such as Catherine Bauer and Lewis Mumford. His earliest commissions were for federally funded workers’ housing, as well as buildings for labor unions and Jewish social service organizations. In the mid-1940s

he and his partner, Oscar Stonorov, published two primers on city planning noteworthy for their emphasis on “the *conservation* and not outright destruction” of older neighborhoods and the active participation of city residents in neighborhood planning commissions. Kahn joined organizations on the left wing of the New Deal coalition, enthusiastically supported the United Nations, and backed Henry Wallace’s presidential bid in 1948.<sup>96</sup>

Kahn’s politics became less identifiably “progressive” in subsequent years, but a commitment to modern architecture as a social program and a belief that city planning should promote civic participation remained guiding principles for the rest of his career. Joining the faculty of his alma mater in 1955, Kahn became the charismatic leader of a group of architects and urbanists that included the landscape architects Karl Linn and Ian McHarg, as well as Mumford, who came on board as a visiting scholar. The “Penn School” put the health of the urban core front and center, fearing that commercial development, suburbanization, and highway construction were devouring the infrastructure of civic life. Percival and Paul Goodman’s 1947 *Communitas: Ways of Livelihood and Means of Life* was a key reference. “A person is a citizen in the street,” the Goodmans argued, a position that found an echo in Kahn’s proposed Civic Center plan for Philadelphia, in which monumental buildings set off public space from commercial encroachment. As Goldhagen observes, Kahn’s assertion in his Civic Center plan that “Center City is a place to go to—not to go through” was a paraphrase of a line from *Communitas*. The challenge was to reinvest the city’s landscape with civic meaning by providing structural markers for shared urban experience—and more importantly, by designing buildings that renewed the original purpose of institutions bringing people together as members of a democratic polity. Kahn told his colleagues to approach commissions for schools, city halls, cultural centers, and places of worship with an understanding of the founding principles that made such institutions vital constituents of a “City-Place.” In often-murky Platonist language, he summoned up the ideal type of an institution—its “Form” or “existence-will”—and insisted that architects attend to “what a thing wants to be.” A school was “a realm of spaces which are good for learning.” A chapel was a “personal ritual.” The crisis of civic life was evident in the degeneration of city halls into places to pay parking tickets. “Participation—the original existence-will, that which made the city hall a city-hall, a village-green, a place for getting together . . . does not exist any more,” he complained in a 1959 lecture. “It must be again a realm of space where people should meet—where fountains play.” By the time he began his most important building projects, Kahn had arrived at an architectural program for the civic and spiritual regeneration of institutions.<sup>97</sup>

The years when Kahn was developing that program coincided with the triumph of architectural modernism as the dominant approach to corporate and government buildings in the United States. The early modern movement had coalesced out of a North Atlantic dialogue among architects, designers, planners, and theorists, with Europeans taking the lead in defining the terms of the movement. But by the 1940s architects working in the United States confidently asserted their position “at the center of things,” even as modernist work in Latin America and Asia took equally innovative and sophisticated forms. The arrival of émigré architects was crucial. The Italian Pietro Belluschi came before the war, as did the Viennese architects Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler. Refugees from Nazi Germany were the most influential arrivals. Walter Gropius immigrated in 1937 and assumed a position at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design. He was joined that year by his Bauhaus colleague Marcel Breuer, and by Mies van der Rohe, who became director of the architecture department at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in Chicago. A year later, Mies embarked on a major building program for the IIT campus. The American-born Frank Lloyd Wright, whose domestic architecture had long captivated European architects, nonetheless remained a powerful, independent presence. His “Fallingwater” house in Pennsylvania (1936–1937) and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York (1956–1959) were triumphs, the culmination of decades of refining an “organic” modernism he proudly identified with the country’s republican traditions.

Modern architects and planners were in the right place at the right time, as American cities undertook construction projects on a scale not seen since the onset of the Great Depression. The 1949 Housing and Urban Redevelopment Act and the 1954 Urban Renewal Act, followed by the 1956 Federal Highway Act, drastically reshaped the urban landscape. “Blighted” neighborhoods (often occupied by new African American arrivals) were bulldozed in sweeping “urban renewal” projects, displacing more than seven hundred thousand families between 1949 and 1967. Public housing projects inspired by the “towers in the park” of Le Corbusier’s “Radiant City” plan provided homes to some of those displaced, offering light, ventilation, and space not available in tenement apartments but often isolating residents in huge slab buildings surrounded by desolate plazas.<sup>98</sup>

The corporate and government leaders remaking American cities looked for guidance in the strain of modernist discourse least concerned with social issues—namely, the formalist approach to design associated with Mies and his American follower Philip Johnson. Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock had prepared the ground with their 1932 *International Style* exhibition

at the Museum of Modern Art. The show gave short shrift to the social modernism that inspired the young Kahn and promoted instead a formalist high style suitable for corporate office buildings and homes for the wealthy. The very name of the show was significant, with the “modern movement” (the term preferred by social modernists) giving way to a “style.” “Today a single new style has come into existence,” Johnson and Hitchcock announced in the catalogue accompanying the show, which reduced the movement to three formal components. “First, a new conception of architecture as volume rather than as mass. Secondly, regularity rather than axial symmetry serves as the chief means of ordering design. These two principles, with a third proscribing arbitrary applied decoration, mark the productions of the international style.” A follow-up 1952 MOMA exhibition, *Built in the USA*, showcased office buildings, upscale apartment complexes, and luxury private homes, with only one industrial structure on display.<sup>99</sup>

Making a building’s structural elements legible took precedence over almost everything else in this formalist account. The new technologies and materials that Bauhaus architects had once hoped would enable the mass production of homes for working people now emerged as components of a sleek, glass-and-steel program for office buildings. Mies’s stunning use of non-load-bearing glass walls seemingly hung in air over an interior steel skeleton defined the look of corporate modernism. From the IIT campus he moved to the row of upscale apartment towers on Chicago’s Lake Shore Drive (1949–1952) and then on to other projects, notably a collaboration with Johnson on the Seagram Building in New York (1954–1958). The building was a jewel box on Park Avenue, rising over an open plaza in a sheath of topaz-tinted glass. Across the street stood the equally elegant Lever House (1949–1952) designed by Skidmore Owings & Merrill. Lesser architects replicated the formula, creating one after another glass-curtained structures in what Robert Twombly calls “an architecture of aloof anonymity.”<sup>100</sup>

As Kahn worked toward his mature style, his dissent from the Miesian mode became clearer. He was himself a modernist, concerned with volume and the opportunities new engineering techniques allowed for configuring spaces and distributing weight. He was as hostile to applied adornment as Johnson and Hitchcock. But he regretted the reduction of the movement to a luxury “style.” “Here the modern movement is only thirty years old,” Kahn observed in 1960, “and we already polishing it and perfecting it.” His steadfast focus on designing places of assembly was itself a rebuke of corporate modernism: his works were emphatically *not* aloof or anonymous. Equally decisive was his choice of materials. Kahn built with masonry, reinforced concrete, and wood. His exterior walls were in fact walls of stone, not glass curtains.

An appointment to the American Academy of Rome in 1950 left him with a deep respect for ancient monuments—the Pantheon especially. He investigated properties of physical mass and weight that literally grounded visitors in a specific location while granting institutions the dignity they deserved. “A building should be a more stable and *harboring* thing,” he explained. Above all he wanted people to see how buildings were made. Concrete for his buildings was often poured on site—not precast—with the imprint of plywood frames still visible in the finished walls. Imperfections in concrete and brick walls, exposed joints, and other signs of the buildings’ making were evidence of the human labor that created the spaces where people gathered for education, governance, and worship. Architecture should make citizens conscious of a world people had created with their own hands. “I believe in frank architecture,” he told an interviewer. “A building is a struggle, not a miracle, and the architecture should acknowledge this.”<sup>101</sup>

What saved those buildings from a sense of oppressive weight were two techniques that Kahn refined in his mature work. The first involved the use of obliquely angled sight lines, unusual points of entrance, and carefully articulated rooms of different shapes and sizes. Such devices confounded visitors’ expectations of axial organization, forcing them to “read” and possess interior spaces with concentrated attention and interest. Then Kahn sculpted natural light to provide visual contrast with the massive exterior walls of his buildings, endowing assembly spaces with a profound spiritual presence. Kahn’s lectures emphasized the power of natural light in interiors—“a world borrowing its light from another world.” Four light wells anchor the sanctuary of the Rochester Unitarian Church, with indirect natural lighting seeming to levitate the sloping concrete cruciform ceiling high above the congregation. At the Salk Institute, two rows of six-story laboratories and wood-clad studies mirror one another across a gleaming courtyard, with a central channel cut for a narrow stream of water flowing toward the Pacific. In both projects, the position of the sun transforms the buildings, making each moment different from the one before. The physical effects of sunlight on visitors amplify the tactility of Kahn’s materials, creating an intensity of feeling unique to his buildings. An architect admirer believed Kahn’s use of light joined the spiritual and material in a transformative sensory experience: “His architecture is sensorial, not just formal.”<sup>102</sup>

Kahn’s lectures revealed the dialectical imagination at work in his approach to architecture. “A great building,” he wrote in 1960, “must begin with the unmeasurable, must go through measurable means when it is being designed and in the end must be unmeasurable.” Concrete, brick, wood, and glass were the means to something more—communal belonging, awareness

of one's location, intense feeling, even a glimpse of grace. Accepting the American Institute of Architects Gold Medal for lifetime achievement in 1971, Kahn summed up his philosophy. He called again for "the re-creation of the meaning of city, as primarily an assembly of those places vested with the care to uphold the sense of a way of life." The "thoughtful and meaningful making of spaces"—what he now called "availabilities"—had as its goal the making of meaning-full lives. "Availabilities to all can be the source of a tremendous release of the values locked in us of the unmeasurable in living: the art of living."<sup>103</sup>

### Experience as Art

Soaking up the impulses of the new modernism like a sponge, Allan Kaprow took the "enactments" of the late 1940s and 1950s to their logical conclusion. Kaprow assimilated Pollock's assault on the autonomy of painting and the viewing subject, the physicality Pollock shared with the new poetics, and the experiments in performance at Black Mountain in an art of Happenings that dissolved art into a social process and finally gave up art itself for an aestheticized existence. With Kaprow, Dewey's "art as experience"—Black Mountain's "art-experience"—became experience as art.

Pollock had met Dewey in Kaprow's dazzling opening act as a critic, with artistic practice given license to become a new worldly praxis. As Kaprow recalled several years later, "I was concerned with the implication that action painting—Pollock's in particular—led not to more painting, but to *more action*."<sup>104</sup> And without mentioning either one in his essay, Kaprow drew on what he had learned from Cage and Rauschenberg, artists whose work likewise sought meaning in the everyday. Kaprow had attended the New York debut of Cage's controversial "silent piece," 4'33'', at Carnegie Hall. David Tudor first performed 4'33'' in Woodstock, New York, in August 1952, setting a stopwatch on a piano then opening and closing the instrument's cover at three intervals without playing a single note. After four minutes and thirty-three seconds, Tudor was done. Coin tosses Cage interpreted with the ancient Chinese system of *I Ching* determined the length of the piece and its intervals. Cage's score was an open notational field of unmarked lines and durations that in its different versions became iconic images of abstract art. Audience members sat in silence as the sound of wind and a gathering rainstorm outside filled the performance space.<sup>105</sup> When Kaprow heard the piece later that year at Carnegie Hall, the sounds of silence were interspersed with audience members giggling and coughing nervously, the humming of the ventilation system, and the police sirens and other traffic noise from the

streets outside. Cage was opening the audience to the full landscape of sound, encouraging intense aesthetic attention to the music of daily life.

A year later, Kaprow went to an exhibition of the all-white paintings by Rauschenberg that had anticipated Cage's 4'33''. ("To Whom It May Concern," Cage wrote later: "The white paintings came/first; my silent piece/came later."<sup>106</sup>) Kaprow found "a numbing, devastating silence" in those paintings that was at the same time an announcement of possibility.<sup>107</sup> He saw his own shadows move as he walked in front of the white canvases and recognized in that very act of perception a new kind of art making. Looking back, Kaprow said of Rauschenberg and Cage: "There is no marking of the boundary of the artwork or the boundary of so-called everyday life. They merge."<sup>108</sup>

Kaprow became one of Cage's closest students, enrolling in the courses on composition that Cage taught at the New School in 1957 and 1958 in order to learn more about chance operations and the manipulation of taped sounds, both of which figured in his later Happenings. Cage also provided a pathway to Zen Buddhism, most likely the variant Cage himself had learned at Columbia from D. T. Suzuki. Suzuki's idea of satori—of a moment of enlightenment that opens up an attentive experience of the universe—was likely an impetus to Cage's 4'33''.<sup>109</sup> And Suzuki himself was an avid reader of Emerson and James. His first published essay was on Emerson, and he may have met Dewey when he first came to the United States as a young man in the 1890s. There were parallels between Suzuki's Zen and the Emerson-Dewey lineage that could not have escaped Kaprow: a hostility to dualisms of body and mind; of subject and object; a belief in experience as flux; an openness to uncertainty; and a desire to overcome the limits of self. At the very moment that James and Dewey disappeared from philosophy syllabi they appeared before American artists in Zen garb. Over time Kaprow's engagement with Zen would deepen into a serious practice.

Kaprow will always be remembered as the creator of *18 Happenings in Six Parts*, an event that took place six times in October 1959 in the loftlike space of New York's Reuben Gallery.<sup>110</sup> Although Cage had staged his own Happening seven years earlier at Black Mountain, it was *18 Happenings* that introduced the term and elevated Kaprow as a major figure in the New York avant-garde scene. Contrary to the popular conception of such events as loose and improvisational, *18 Happenings* was tightly scored with instructions for participants and members of the audience. A form letter invitation to the event warned attendees not to "look for paintings, sculpture, the dance, or

music. The artist disclaims any intention to provide them.” Nor should they plan to sit passively, as at the theater. “As one of the seventy-five persons present, you will become a part of the happenings; you will simultaneously experience them.”<sup>111</sup>

What those who attended experienced was a disorienting, one-hour multimedia event designed to assault all five senses. Audience members entered a loft space divided into three rooms, with chairs arranged differently in each, and were instructed to move from room to room at timed intervals. Semitransparent plastic sheets allowed limited visual access to activities in adjoining spaces but offered no sonic insulation to prevent sounds from leaking from one room to another. Kaprow’s collages and assemblages hung in two of the rooms. The overall effect was of urban, industrial clutter—plastic, torn canvas, paper, and a hanging electrical cord. Different activities were timed to take place simultaneously in each of the rooms: slides were projected on walls; lights went on and off; a muslin tarp was painted; a woman made orange juice and passed out samples; tapes of electronic music and raw noise competed with the reading of poems and fragmentary declamations on art by various participants. The actors Kaprow enlisted moved robotically as they carried out their assigned tasks. Kaprow himself wheeled a mirrored “sandwich man” construction from room to room; a record player inside played dance music as he moved along.

In *18 Happenings*, Kaprow later recalled, “I set up a three-ring circus space.”<sup>112</sup> But unlike a circus, audience members were not allowed to sit passively and applaud but were instead deployed as props, moved around in sequence (and given strict instructions *not* to applaud). Far more than any of his later works, *18 Happenings* choreographed the audience, using them as raw materials in a flowing, three-dimensional collage of space, time, sound, image, and smell. Kaprow remembered “moving people around in and out of environmentally filled areas; like a literalization of . . . the clottedness of an Abstract Expressionist painting.”<sup>113</sup>

If *18 Happenings* was not pure improvisation, neither was it entirely joyful. An undertow of control militated against the free flow of conversation and activity during the performance sequences. Cage—who attended *18 Happenings* along with Marcel Duchamp, Meyer Schapiro, and other art luminaries—criticized Kaprow on exactly this score, accusing him of bullying the audience and dictating the activities of the artists who joined him in the performance. There was not enough chance activity for Cage: Kaprow was too present in the work as director-impresario-circus master. Kaprow nevertheless saw *18 Happenings* as a step beyond Cage because it introduced



chance into the reception of art. Kaprow may have controlled his actors, but he ceded interpretive authority over the work's meaning to his invited guests. Audience members strained to understand activities they could never see as a whole from a single perspective. Meaning had to be hammered out in conversation during the breaks Kaprow built into the schedule of *18 Happenings*. In fact, the intervals between the six parts ran longer than the performances, leaving time for those in attendance to compare notes on what they had witnessed.

The piece also represented Kaprow's first critique of traditional exhibition spaces. While Cage performed experimental work in auditoriums and galleries, Kaprow filled sites with the detritus of urban consumer culture. In a 1961 installation titled *Yard*, Kaprow piled hundreds of used tires in the backyard of the Martha Jackson Gallery in Manhattan, which usually served as a sculpture garden. Viewers who came to view art hanging on pristine white walls were invited to go out back and wade through filthy, smelly tires and toss them around. Pollock's overall paintings reemerged as a junk landscape. A catalog juxtaposed a photograph of Pollock "in" his paintings, flinging paint across the canvas, with one of Kaprow in the yard.

Kaprow was striving for a nonmimetic urban realism, an art of flux and excess made from the chaos of city life that would force viewers to see their environment anew. His 1962 environmental piece *Words* bombarded visitors with the random visual iconography of advertisements, newspapers, movie marquees, and graffiti, all accompanied by recorded music, lectures, and nonsense talk played simultaneously on three record players. Here was the culture of Forty-Second Street Kaprow had invoked in his essay on Pollock and the sounds of the city that reverberated through Carnegie Hall during the performance of Cage's *4'33''*.

As the 1960s progressed, Kaprow wearied of the hoopla surrounding the Happenings he and other artists were making and worried he had become a party to a culture of spectacle that prevented critical reflection on his work's meaning. His writings called for the elimination of the audience, and his "events"—the term he now preferred to "Happenings"—came to focus on the bodily activities, consciousness, and conversations of participants. Kaprow gave participants looser, more open-ended instructions and allowed them greater freedom to formulate strategies for their execution. He also dispersed activities geographically—sometimes in multiple cities at once—so that full understanding of the work emerged only after the fact, as he and others swapped stories about their experiences. Kaprow set many of his activities in public places, but he was no public artist. The activities of non-participants in

those places barely concerned him. Nor was he a political artist. He resisted pressures to align his work with the political movements of the day. Kaprow's preoccupation was *social art*—an art that dispersed art making and socialized the self. If these new “events” had a subject, it was subjectivity itself. The transcendence of self through participatory aesthetic experience emerged as the focus of his artistic practice, setting in motion a profound transformation of his work and life. He took Pollock's self-annihilation as far as it could go. Art could be made without an artist; the “un-artist” situated in the everyday was his ideal.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s Kaprow turned to the preoccupations with the psychological “contact/boundary” between bodies that had animated so many 1950s artists. An “experience,” he later reflected, “is thought which has been ‘incorporated,’ on a muscular, neural, even cellular level, into the body.”<sup>14</sup> He responded to challenges from feminist artists with works that explored rituals of the body and human intimacy, often with attention to strained relationships between men and women. The scale of his work shrank in size, sometimes involving no more than two participants, and their focus shrank as well: to physical attraction and repulsion, eye contact, the need for connection and the inhibitions that prevented connection. The next logical step was to move the site of his work to the confines of his own intimate life, to conversations and activities he staged with friends and with his wife, and then finally to his own individual experience. In the 1970s he followed Cage's example and began a serious Zen practice that continued throughout the rest of his life. He scripted events he performed alone, which intensified awareness of his own body and mundane activities: recording his pulse; breathing on the mirror; brushing his teeth. Interrupting the “routinized and unnoticed” activities that consumed his life, “I looked up once and saw, really saw, my face in the mirror.”<sup>15</sup>

Dewey and Pollock had taken Kaprow from the canvas to Forty-Second Street, from the dispersal of artistic authority pioneered at Black Mountain performances to a Zen emptying of the self, and on to bodily enactments of personal experience. The romantic, pragmatist, and Buddhist traditions he and Cage embraced sought the transcendence of the autonomous self and art object alike in pursuit of a spiritualized existence. Two epigraphs for a history of those traditions he read in manuscript must have resonated powerfully. From John Ruskin: “I believe any sensible person would change his pictures, however good, for windows.” And from the Buddha: “Certainly the man is grateful to his fine raft, but does it make sense for him to carry it on his back now that he's reached the other side?”<sup>16</sup>

Kaprow completed the voyage American modernists had begun after the war and pushed the raft away. “Let’s say,” he proposed, “that art is a weaving of meaning-making activity with any or all parts of our lives.”<sup>117</sup> He had once described experimental art as “a prelude.” A prelude to what, his readers might have asked. Now in 1987—forty years after Pollock placed himself “in” his paintings—Kaprow offered an answer. The point was to place oneself in *life*. Experimental art “can be an introduction to right living; and after that introduction art can be bypassed for the main course.”<sup>118</sup>

## CHAPTER SEVEN



# Thinking Globally

According to an American nationalist myth of long standing, the United States represented the best of the New World against a corrupt Old World and bore unique qualities contrary to the common patterns of all other nations' experience. Such were the "pretensions of innocency" many Americans held, the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote in 1952: "Whether our nation interprets its spiritual heritage through Massachusetts or Virginia, we came into existence with the sense of being a 'separated' nation, which God was using to make a new beginning for mankind."<sup>1</sup> Known by the mid-twentieth century as American exceptionalism, this conceit was in large part fiction, or at least highly exaggerated, much like the notion that "isolationism" was characteristic of American policy prior to World War II. Given the business civilization of the United States, Americans had never been indifferent to opportunities for trade and diplomatic relations abroad; growing economic power in the late nineteenth century heightened this disposition as overseas conquest and colonial administration—marks of any great power at the time—became part of the American repertoire. Nonetheless, the exceptionalist idea played a significant part in helping to rationalize actions by the nation's leaders whenever they chose to go it alone, with or without allies, in foreign affairs. To be sure, the United States did enjoy exceptional status in World War II insofar as it suffered no violent devastation whatsoever on its core territory or any diminution of its economic resources. Still, the advent of the postwar period marked a qualitative change in the character of the country's relation to the rest of the world. The new hegemonic

stature of the United States “at the center” of world affairs called for a new kind of engagement with social, political, and cultural phenomena far afield from its continental North American home.

Louis Hartz captured these paradoxes well, for even as he gained a reputation as exponent of American exceptionalism, he was actually a fierce critic. In his best-known work, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955), he famously claimed that Americans had “escaped the past” of feudalism, a heritage that left the bloody Old World, he claimed, subject to extremes of reaction and revolution largely missing from the US experience. Yet in a part of his argument too often neglected by readers and commentators, he argued that Americans’ “escapism” made it impossible for them to see that they were “dealing with social materials common to the Western world.” By claiming to put the past behind them, they also “stifled the future,” for American politics showed a “pathetic” aversion to facing facts of the modern world—problems of property, power, inequality, and social provision. Hartz noted that *both* the United States and Western Europe were weak “in the realm of self-analysis”: they *imagined* themselves shielded from their “common [world] environment” due to conviction either in “European hegemony” or in “American isolation.” But now, he wrote, “when the big wide world rushes in on America and Europe, not to speak of their rushing in on each other, is not this *happy arrogance* fated . . . to end in both cases?”<sup>2</sup>

Hartz might have gone further: Would the experience of standing “at the center” of world affairs prove in time, ironically, to erode precisely the national ethnocentrism that rested on the supposedly exceptional, “separated” status of the United States?

### The New New World

A sense of openness to the world had grown steadily throughout the twentieth century, as the world-power status of the United States grew ever clearer. Officially, US foreign policy in the 1920s, despite rejection of the League of Nations and resistance to measures of collective security, encouraged adoption of bilateral trade and multilateral arms-limitation treaties. More broadly, Americans pricked up their ears to sounds abroad. Philanthropic foundations like the Rockefeller funds promoted transatlantic academic exchanges. Peace sentiment during the interwar years, as well as African American anticolonial internationalism, spurred interest in India and the independence movement there led by Mohandas Gandhi. A long history of trading and missionary interest in China generated a substantial cohort of Sinophile Americans, including the enormously popular Pearl Buck, a daughter of missionaries whose

best-selling 1931 novel of Chinese peasant life, *The Good Earth*, helped stir sympathy for China as it came under Japanese attack. The mobilization of academic experts for the war effort in the 1940s set the stage for what came to be called “area studies” by the 1950s. The anthropologist Ruth Benedict, who had popularized cultural pluralism in her 1932 book *Patterns of Culture*, showed the war-bred turn outward in her “culture and personality” study of Japan, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), begun as part of Benedict’s work as a government adviser and an effective argument to overcome racist hatred of the defeated enemy.

As 1950 approached, ambitious institution builders among scholars and university administrators (and their supporters in the leading philanthropic foundations) argued that the country needed greater knowledge and familiarity with all the terrain of the globe, and veterans entering graduate study with support from GI Bill tuition benefits provided the workforce for world-embracing research projects. The term *area studies* was already in use during the war, as the Rockefeller Foundation in particular vigorously promoted “the planning of regional specialization in higher education and research.” The world crisis and US entry into the war highlighted the need, according to the foundation, for specialists on far-flung regions who were well trained in foreign languages and cultures. The early tenor of these programs was roughly in tune with the liberal “one-world” sentiment of the moment: University of Chicago anthropologist Robert Redfield, later an active proponent of world federalism, wrote of his hopes that such programs would militate against the “European and American cultural provincialism” of US scholars.<sup>3</sup> Thus began the reign of “area studies” on American college campuses. The strain between cosmopolitanism and Cold War combat could make these new fields treacherous terrain, however. The new breed of worldly scholars often faced a measure of fear and suspicion, especially as the mounting Red Scare and the outbreak of the Korean War stirred controversy over espionage, expertise, and foreign affairs.

The field of Chinese studies became the first such battleground. A distinguished writer on Central and East Asian history and geography, Owen Lattimore, became the central figure in rancorous Cold War disputes between different factions of China-oriented Americans (many of them raised in China by missionary parents), identified as either the China Lobby or the China Hands. The first was a group of publicists led by Henry Luce and devoted to the right-wing Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-shek, as Chiang’s Nationalists were losing their battle with the Communists. The second consisted of several State Department advisers and consultants who had long reported on Chiang’s failings, who understood why and how the Chinese

Communists built support among the peasantry, and who urged caution on any further US involvement in the civil war.

Lattimore's troubles began in 1945, when the FBI discovered confidential State Department documents in possession of a left-leaning magazine, *Amerasia*, associated with a private group known as the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR). Lattimore served on the IPR board. Founded in 1925, IPR began as the project of ecumenical American Protestants in Hawaii; by the 1930s its headquarters moved to New York as IPR built national affiliates around the world, including one in the Soviet Union. Lattimore and other IPR officers on *Amerasia's* board were not directly implicated when the government pressed espionage charges against *Amerasia* editors and one of their contacts in the State Department, John S. Service—the first of the “China Hands” to be accused of Communist sympathies. Later, after the Chinese Communist Party came to power in October 1949, the China Lobby furiously attacked the Truman administration for failing to come to Chiang's aid, presumably under the influence of alleged Communists or fellow travelers in the State Department. Lattimore—whose war service included escorting Vice President Henry Wallace on a 1944 tour of Siberia and China—was labeled a traitor and Soviet spy by Joseph McCarthy, though two Senate committees cleared him of any offenses. Lattimore gave up his post as director of the Johns Hopkins University School of International Relations in the midst of the Senate hearings, defending himself against what he called “Ordeal by Slander.” Meanwhile, John Service and other “China Hands,” including John Paton Davies Jr. and John Carter Vincent, head of the State Department's China division, were purged from government service. Lattimore kept his Hopkins teaching position but left it in 1962 for England and a relatively obscure career thereafter. The premier China historian remaining in the United States, Harvard's John K. Fairbank (another missionary-bred scholar), had held views of the Chinese Civil War similar to Lattimore, Service, and the others. After Lattimore's ordeal, he was, according to his students, extremely circumspect on political matters. Nonetheless, Fairbank was excluded from the mainstream press for more than a decade after McCarthyism first struck.<sup>4</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the most robust “area studies” program at the time was Russian and Soviet studies, though the field's development underwent a number of twists and turns showing that the Cold War failed to impose unanimity on scholars. Wartime plans to convene Soviet or “Slavic Studies” programs frequently leaned toward a “Know Your Friend” disposition, based on expectations of collaboration and continued trade after the war's end, writes historian David Engerman—rather than the “Know Your Enemy” ap-

proach that came to characterize the field from the late 1940s on. The head of the USSR Division in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the World War II predecessor of the CIA, was a Columbia historian of Russia, Geroid Tanquary Robinson, who initially advocated a Rockefeller-funded institute at the university to prepare “specialists to understand Russia and Russians.” Robinson’s background included time spent in bohemian circles of Greenwich Village and contributions to the 1919 *Dial* favorable to Bolshevism; others at the Russian Institute founded under Robinson’s leadership in 1946 and at another such program at Stanford had left-leaning sentiments, such as Columbia’s Ernest Simmons, who campaigned for Henry Wallace in 1948. Yet overt dissent from US foreign policy had little place in the field as the Cold War set in. At Harvard’s Carnegie Corporation–backed Russian Research Center (RRC), the first director, Clyde Kluckhohn, dismissed the young historian H. Stuart Hughes from his job as assistant director because Hughes’s support for Wallace in 1948 was deemed an embarrassment.

Kluckhohn had come a long way since his private dissent from Henry Luce’s imperialism in 1942. Now possessing a top-secret security clearance to grant him access to classified government resources, he took on projects at the RRC for the departments of State and Defense as well as the Central Intelligence Agency, involving propaganda broadcasts into Eastern Europe and recruitment of Soviet defectors to serve as informants for scholarly and governmental ventures. At the same time, he stayed in touch with the FBI, initially in the effort to ward off the intrusion of J. Edgar Hoover’s zealous Red-hunting agents suspicious of the RRC’s staff. Scholars studying the Soviet Union faced congressmen’s suspicion that their research implied political sympathy for the Soviets. As congressional committees geared up in 1950 for investigations of the major philanthropic foundations—Rockefeller fund support for the Institute of Pacific Affairs served the inquisitors as one example of the foundations’ dubious loyalty—RRC’s concern to maintain clear anticommunist credentials only increased. Despite conservative congressional suspicion, many foundations—from Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford to the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation—worked symbiotically with government intelligence agencies to fund the agencies’ favored research projects.

In the interlocking world of government, foundations, and elite academic life, political sensitivity led university administrators like Harvard dean McGeorge Bundy to screen graduate students for Communist affiliations, such as the young sociologist Robert Bellah, whose recently past membership in the Communist Party endangered the continuance of his graduate funding. Like Bellah, the young historian and former Communist Party member Sigmund Diamond was pressured by Bundy to cooperate fully with FBI investigators in nam-



ing former Communist Party associates—and was then denied a teaching and administrative appointment at Harvard due to his “incomplete candor,” that is, his refusal to discuss past political activities of anyone other than himself.<sup>5</sup>

Despite such pressures, the field of “Sovietology” was far from monolithic or bound in complete obeisance to US Cold War policy. The Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse published a respected account of Soviet Marxism—and continued work in government consultancies into the early 1950s, until he gave up hope that he might temper anti-Soviet extremism among war-minded policymakers. Marcuse’s friend Barrington Moore Jr., an iconoclast with left-wing views and a long-time affiliate of the Russian Research Center, challenged simplistic ideas of “totalitarianism” that saw no possibilities of change in the Soviet order; his argument that further industrial development could move Soviet administration away from repressive terror actually bore a good deal of influence in the field.<sup>6</sup> Other popular ideas, such as the argument by the “culture and personality” writer Geoffrey Gorer that Russian child-rearing practices, particularly the tight swaddling of infants, produced the authoritarian disposition of Soviet communism, were greeted with acute skepticism at the RRC. Much more sophisticated, unbiased studies such as Joseph Berliner’s pioneering work to document the growth of the Soviet economy counted as a major scholarly achievement.

Aside from Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union, the break-up of the great empires in the wave of postwar decolonization spawned new studies of the wider world. These fields proved to be no less politically fraught than Chinese studies and academic Sovietology. Anticolonial sentiments continued to inspire young American intellectuals—some with communist, socialist, or anarchist views, but most of them dedicated to a Rooseveltian or Willkie-like promise of “a better world” of free peoples. They struck out to begin close studies of the new nations. As the Red Scare dampened expectations of postwar social reform at home, it appeared that social change was lodged overseas in the ostensibly democratic, professedly socialist spirit of new nations such as Jawaharlal Nehru’s India, which won independence in 1947, and Indonesia, freed from the Netherlands in 1949 under Sukarno’s leadership. The birth of new nations could be traumatic, as in the hasty partition of India and Pakistan, which witnessed mass movements of Hindus and Muslims across new borders, often pushed by the massacre of minority populations in formerly mixed regions.

The declaration of Israel’s independence in 1948 was a special case. Based on a partition plan approved by the United Nations, even though none of the Arab countries in the region had agreed, Israel’s creation as a Jewish homeland served partly as recompense for Europe’s Judeocide—and a moral

and political safety valve for other nations, like the United States, reluctant to take in large numbers of Europe's displaced persons. It landed within a region having, like Africa and South, Southeast, and East Asia, its own modern movements of anticolonialism. American adventurers and sojourners in the region, having developed expertise in Middle Eastern affairs and languages, often sympathized with Arab nationalism against the residues of French and British power derived from the League of Nation's interwar "mandate" system. Meanwhile, many American supporters of Israel, including the left-wing journalist I. F. Stone, believed their cause also rested on anti-imperialist (anti-British) grounds and greeted the early Labour Party government there as an indication of a worldwide social-democratic drift. The combined politics of oil, Arab and Persian nationalism, and the intrusion of Cold War rivalries into the region would soon stir new crises, from covert action by Britain and the United States to overthrow Iran's prime minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953 to the world-shaking Suez affair of 1956.

### **Awakening to Anticolonialism**

American scholars began tracking developments across the decolonizing world. In Southeast Asia, World War II veteran George McTurnan Kahin watched firsthand the revolution that ended Dutch rule in Indonesia. Son of nonconformist middle-class parents in Seattle, Kahin had wide-ranging international interests even in his teens, when he spent a year in postrevolutionary Mexico and became entranced with Lazaro Cardenas's agrarian reform. At Harvard in the late 1930s, he joined the American Student Union and shared views critical of British imperialism but left the organization when its Communist members defended the Hitler-Stalin Pact for its duration from August 1939 to June 1941. A student of John King Fairbank, he was uncertain he had a promising future as China historian and contemplated alternative careers; later, when inducted into the army and selected for intelligence work, he was assigned to a unit organized to join General Douglas MacArthur's forces in freeing Indonesia from the Japanese. Language training in Dutch took primacy over Indonesian, especially since MacArthur intended to restore the Dutch authorities to power there. Although he was reassigned to routine duties in Europe near the end of the war, Kahin's training for deployment in Southeast Asia led him to graduate work in Asian studies at Johns Hopkins as an admiring student of Owen Lattimore.

The British had taken over MacArthur's mission in Indonesia and ushered Dutch troops back to the islands even as Indonesian nationalists led by Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta declared independence at the very moment

of Japan's surrender. In time, Dutch troops fighting with US-supplied equipment regained half the country's area in a stand off against the independent Republic. When Kahin got there in mid-1948 to study the revolution, he was the only American living in the Republic-held areas, where US betrayal of anticolonial principles left Indonesians deeply aggrieved. He was to write a dissertation, published as a book in 1952 as *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, unique in the literature on decolonization for its author's actual presence in 1948–1949 when the Dutch assault across the cease-fire lines and the Republic's counterattack turned the tide of international opinion and led to full independence by the end of 1949. His months in Republican territory and friendly relations with leaders of virtually all political factions among the nationalists gave him conclusive proof that nationalist sentiment generally favorable to socialist reforms had strong support among Indonesian peasants and town dwellers. After Sukarno and Hatta suppressed a bungled Communist revolt against their leadership, US policy shifted away from the Dutch to endorse the Republic. Nonetheless, Kahin had seen a good deal of deceit and heavy-handed manipulation by American officials there. He had also alienated the leading State Department emissary (later ambassador) in Indonesia, who claimed Kahin had gotten too close to the Indonesian Communists and therefore arranged to have Kahin's passport revoked.<sup>7</sup>

Back at Hopkins in late 1949, Kahin wrote up his dissertation, taught in Lattimore's School of International Relations, and defended his mentor when McCarthy labeled him a Soviet agent. As he strove to get his passport renewed, Kahin now had even more enemies, including the chair of the Hopkins political science department, who attempted to smear Kahin when he applied for a job in Southeast Asian studies at Cornell. The worst the chair could say, in all truth, was that Kahin was "a Quixotic liberal" who had collaborated with the American Friends Service Committee in 1942 to aid Japanese Americans in Seattle slated for internment; this intervention backfired, and Kahin got the Cornell job. In early 1953, the Ford Foundation sent emissaries to several leading universities to promote studies of Japan, India, Indonesia, and Iran, with a focus on Communist movements in those countries, but Kahin, regarding that as a narrow "obsession," insisted on studies of the entire spectrum of nationalist politics in Indonesia. He got support on that basis and opened the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project soon afterward. After nearly four years, Kahin regained his passport in time to attend the April 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia—organized primarily by Indonesian president Sukarno, India's Nehru, and the Egyptian nationalist Gamal Abdel Nasser—that debuted the idea of a new, neutralist, and anticolonial bloc in world affairs.

Welcoming delegates to Bandung, independence leader Sukarno declared, "This is the first intercontinental conference of colored peoples in the history of mankind," and so, he said, "Let a new Asia and a new Africa be born." He went on to assert that this postcolonial alliance represented a world force in its own right, for in the face of nuclear-armed cold war, "We can inject the voice of reason into world affairs. We can mobilize all the spiritual, all the moral, all the political strength of Asia and Africa on the side of peace."<sup>8</sup>

Sukarno's keynote drew the attention of American pacifists, who were, at about that time, gearing up for a new surge of activism protesting the nuclear arms race. Homer A. Jack, an Evanston, Illinois, Unitarian minister and activist in the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), reported from the scene: "Bandung created a new bloc, a third camp . . . [which will] help keep the peace the world so desperately desires. Bandung may just be the hinge of history."<sup>9</sup> At Bandung, Jack represented the International League of the Rights of Man—a small organization, led by retired ACLU founder Roger Baldwin, that saw decolonization as an essential element of human rights. His report, published by an organ known as *Toward Freedom: A Newsletter on Colonial Affairs*, received the endorsement of a group of liberal and left-wing intellectuals, including veteran pacifists such as Emily Greene Balch, who had received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946 for her decades-long work with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. The expatriate writer Richard Wright also traveled to Bandung from Paris, portraying the conference as an insurgency by peoples of color, though he also expressed reservations about the traditionalist Muslim identity that also figured prominently among the delegates. More wary than Jack's pacifist circle, Wright nonetheless saw the proceedings as a great watershed in world history, the rise of a force on the other side of the "the color curtain" from the imperial white world.<sup>10</sup>

Kahin proved to be the most astute American observer of the conference, carefully dissecting the political motives of its principal organizers and the tensions running through the event. The ostensible "neutralism" of Bandung was somewhat less rigorous than it appeared. Notwithstanding Sukarno's declaration of postcolonial autonomy from the superpowers, two contrasting poles emerged at the meeting: one represented by Communist China's prime minister Chou En-Lai, whose attendance and compelling speech represented a global "coming out" for the People's Republic; the other by Philippine writer and politician Carlos Romulo, who maintained a clear, pro-American stance. Kahin recognized that one of the paramount aims of the key organizers, particularly Nehru (along with leaders of Ceylon and Burma), was concern over Communist-affiliated oppositions in their own

countries, hoping that China would not promote them. To that end, they wished that China, drawn near the Bandung fold, would declare autonomy from the Soviet Union and its Cold War foreign policy. In other words, the ostensible neutralism of the conference carried a strong element of anticommunism even if it was not pro-American, and the rhetoric promoting a transnational, postcolonial front veiled many domestic concerns by new political elites nervous about political stability and their own power. Nonetheless, Kahin was a firm supporter of anticolonial nationalism and would remain, within US politics, a vigorous critic of American hostility toward national liberation movements.<sup>11</sup>

Area studies would continue to grow and proliferate at American universities, reaching into new fields. Although scholars at historically black colleges and universities, such as William Leo Hansberry at Howard University, had studied and taught African history and culture since the 1930s, the first African studies program at a historically white institution was established at Northwestern University in 1948 by anthropologist Melville Herskovits, who went on to spearhead the foundation-backed African Studies Association in 1957—usually recognized as the breakthrough event in formal “Africanist” scholarship. The Middle East, South Asia, and Latin America were additional foci of such research, which tended to emphasize contemporary affairs rather than the deep past. Older traditions in scholarship attended to some of these lands, but in different terms: “Orientalism,” though of European provenance, held an honored place at some institutions, such as the University of Chicago, where it entailed archaeology and philology concerning the ancient Fertile Crescent and neighboring regions. Sinology likewise had been rooted in linguistic, textual, and art-historical expertise more or less focused on antiquities; and in subsequent years, not a few critics would view postwar-area studies as a corrosive influence whose presentism unfortunately denigrated older forms of close study and erudition.<sup>12</sup>

### What Was World History?

Some of those scholarly traditions would be kept alive in other initiatives of the 1940s and 1950s, particularly those concerned with the study of plural “civilizations” as well as “world history.” Robert Redfield had already plowed new ground for American anthropology by studying peasant communities in central Mexico and the Yucatan during the 1920s and 1930s, marking a departure from the field’s concentration on American Indian traditions viewed as “primitive” cultures. After the war, he joined the Chicago world federalists in plotting out a program of research and teaching dedicated to ex-

pand global understanding. He thought in terms of comparative civilizations, recognizing China, Japan, India, Islam, and others as “Great Traditions” on par with “the West,” while also trying to bring those grand achievements of thought, belief, and heritage down to earth in the lived experience of the “little village.” Meanwhile, UNESCO, headquartered in Paris, proposed the need for a new, synthetic world history—produced by international teams of scholars and determined to give respectful attention to all cultures, breaking from prior standards that granted “world-historical” significance only to the evolution of European culture from Greek and Roman origins.

The rejuvenation of world history, with claims to represent a more comprehensive and inclusive approach, was an especially grand “centering” initiative of the time. UNESCO established an International Commission for a History of the Scientific and Cultural Development of Mankind and began publishing a trilingual organ that ran from 1953 to 1972: *Cahiers d'histoire Mondiale/ Journal of World History/ Cuadernos de Historia Mundial*. The principal American historian who took part in this project was Louis Gottschalk, president of the American Historical Association in 1953. He spent well over a decade writing such a world history spanning the years 1300–1775, only to be criticized for a kind of breadth and coverage that remained shapeless.<sup>13</sup> One of Gottschalk’s collaborators, the pioneering social and cultural historian Caroline Ware, began working with Dutch and Indian coauthors in the late 1950s on the twentieth-century volume of the *History of the Cultural and Scientific Development of Mankind*, which likewise failed to satisfy critics who judged it either too censorious or too uncritical of Marxian communism.<sup>14</sup>

Grand compilations attempting to survey “everything” posed daunting challenges. The more decisive and opinionated syntheses of “world” scope that had fascinated earlier American readers were clearly no longer suitable: Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* was tarred with the conservative nationalism and cultural pessimism (and flirtation with Nazism) of its author. More palatable was the work of the English historian Arnold Toynbee, begun in the 1930s and completed, in ten volumes, by 1952. Toynbee showed a decent respect for “our modern Western Democracy,” and while drawing a sharp line between primitive society and “civilization”—only the latter had a history strictly speaking—he conceded that there were many distinct civilizations over the span of history, each following an independent life course. It just so happened that in his own time, only “Western civilization” had not yet reached what Toynbee regarded as the inevitable point of “breakdown” and “disintegration,” though it too seemed headed that way. In Toynbee’s view, real change only came from “superior personalities” or a “creative minority’s

lead,” in contrast with the “uncreative majority.” The latter’s adaptation to the new norm, however far it went, ultimately deprived the order of vitality and led to decline. Thus Toynbee lent gentlemanly gravitas to a long story of growth and decay marking any one of several distinct human civilizations. One critic, recognizing Toynbee’s adoption of a kind of cultural pluralism from anthropology, sneered, “Toynbee soothes his own and our conscience with regard to the subject people within our society and in the colonial countries by denying any preeminent spiritual value to western civilization at the same time that he undermines our faith in those democratic ideas that have now been taken over in their turn by the oppressed classes and nations in their pursuit of freedom.”<sup>15</sup> A more “American” and progressivist analog to Toynbee’s work appeared in the similarly ambitious, multivolume (but more strictly “Western”) *History of Civilization*, by the American writers Will and Ariel Durant, who completed a full eleven volumes between 1935 and 1975 for an enthusiastic middle-brow readership.

The grand speculative work that Toynbee and the Durants undertook always had an ambiguous relation to professional historical scholarship, rooted in empirical, archival research and framed generally in national terms. Attempts to revive an approach to world history that would measure up to professional standards came to a focus at Chicago, where scholars had already forged connections to world-federalist aspirations and to the UNESCO historical projects. William H. McNeill, who in the 1930s had studied with Redfield, embarked on a world history that countered Toynbee’s treatment of separable and autonomous civilizations, striving instead to comprehend dynamic interactions across cultures, time, and space in one synthetic account. That aim led to his publication of *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* in 1963. In contrast to Spengler, McNeill did not identify “the West” so completely with Europe, nor did he view it as a culture in decline. By the point when McNeill finished his monumental study, “the West” clearly included the United States and signaled a firm transatlantic bond appropriate to the age of NATO and, historian Michael Kimmage argues, John Kennedy’s Cold War popularity in Europe. From Spengler to McNeill, the concept of the West had, in the midcentury years, been recharged with a new, confident sense of progress and achievement, another manifestation of a “reloaded” modernity.

The Chicago milieu was not committed wholly to Western triumphalism, however. Marshall Hodgson, five years McNeill’s junior, collaborated with Louis Gottschalk’s UNESCO project and published an early essay in the *Cahiers d’histoire mondiale*, “Hemispheric Interregional History as an Approach to World History,” that would lead him to challenge all notions that made

“Western” world hegemony the overarching telos of history.<sup>16</sup> He saw most of world history centered, instead, on a vast but roughly integrated area from Morocco to China he called “the Afro-Eurasian Oikoumene” (or ecumene), which from the middle of the first millennium through much of the second millennium CE had generated all the principal bases of development: agrarian city-based cultures more or less geared to “universal” salvational religions with scriptural traditions and accompanied by profound technical advances in mathematics and navigation, as well as the creation of a world market. “Without the cumulative history of the whole Afro-Eurasian Oikoumene, of which the Occident had been an integral part,” the supremacy of “the West” evident only from around 1800 “would be almost unthinkable.”<sup>17</sup> For a long period of time, Islamic societies had granted the ecumene its most effective unity, and to that civilization Hodgson dedicated his life, resulting in his masterpiece, *The Venture of Islam*, published posthumously in three volumes. A lifelong practicing Quaker, he cited the pacifist-abolitionist American Quaker John Woolman in the epigram to *Venture*: “To consider mankind otherwise than brethren, to think favors are peculiar to one nation and to exclude others, plainly supposes a darkness in the understanding.”<sup>18</sup> He regarded the image of the world given by the Mercator projection map as racially biased, exaggerating the prominence of the north Atlantic world and thus creating a “Jim Crow map.” Hodgson’s world history sustained some of the practices of cultural study and deep history eclipsed by the rise of “area studies”—not only due to the presentism of those programs but also their tendency to break up world history into many separate niches—while it also forecast profound challenges to Eurocentrism that would grow as midcentury equipose began to unravel.

### Reason and Dissent in War and Peace

Attempts to define the very nature of “reason” or “mind” figured prominently among the intellectual imperatives of the postwar years, providing almost (but not quite) a second act to the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The example of totalitarian regimes, bolstering their power by broadcasting willfully fantastic propaganda, encouraged a renewed interest in specifying and defending notions of truth, objectivity, science, rationality, and other terms considered firm foundations of knowledge as such. While Herbert Marcuse in 1941 had defined “reason” as the immanent force of critical dissent striving to remake social reality, a major trend of the 1950s considered reason more narrowly as a decision-making tool whose nature and logic could be isolated by econo-



mists, mathematicians, psychologists, and other scientists collaborating with atomic-age military services. Beginning with complex logistical problems such as managing the 1948 Berlin Airlift, and continuing with the strategic and tactical problems of competition between two nuclear-armed superpowers, Defense Department–backed think tanks such as the RAND Corporation invited scholars to apply computer programming and the new field of game theory to enhancing human rationality. Could the sophisticated mathematical description of winning strategies in competitive games help political and military leaders deploy the threat of atomic weapons in ways that deterred an opponent but did not tip the scale to outright apocalyptic nuclear war? The idea of rationally guiding nuclear strategy received its boldest, and most controversial, formulation in two books by an improbable intellectual star, Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (1961) and *Thinking About the Unthinkable* (1962).

Other scholars would use game theory to imagine *deescalating* nuclear confrontations rather than “winning” them, however; and elsewhere in the academy, advocates of a new “cognitive” psychology focused not on decision-making tools but on principles of what historian Jamie Cohen-Cole has called “the open mind,” a mode of reason ideally suited to curiosity, debate, moderation, and flexible adaptation to changing reality—and hence resistant to doctrinaire schemes and hateful bigotry. Whether decision science or cognitive psychology, these ventures sought to discover centered or foundational modes of thought, aiming to uncover the very essence of “reason” and “mind,” even if agreement proved elusive on what were the fundamental principles lying there at the core.

In any case, few intellectuals or policymakers by the late 1950s doubted that the United States maintained “strength at the center” and remained committed to doing so. The Soviet launching of the *Sputnik* satellite aroused some anxiety about the American standing in the Cold War race in arms, as well in science and high technology. The Soviets used the same rocket technology to send *Sputnik* aloft as they applied to the development of an intercontinental ballistic missile; both were debuted in 1957, and the United States had its first successful long-range missile launch, the Atlas, about a year later. Back in 1945–1946, US military operations in Europe had found the leader of Germany’s rocket program, Wernher von Braun and hundreds of the scientists and engineers who worked under his command to create the notorious V-2 rocket aimed against Britain late in the war; all of them were secretly brought to the United States in what might be considered a strategic appendix to the brain drain of Central Europe following Hitler’s ascension

in the 1930s. By 1950, von Braun led rocket development at a major installation at Huntsville, Alabama.

Since the Soviets seemed to have preempted the United States by a year in space and rocket technology, concern over the lag led, among other things, to a new major influx of federal funds to universities through the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958, intended to boost training in science as well as global languages and cultures. A special report to the president drafted by H. Rowan Gaither, one of RAND's founders, called for an additional \$4 billion a year in military spending to make up for lost time, but Eisenhower resisted due both to his fiscal conservatism and to his knowledge that rapid missile advances were already in the works, having enjoyed hefty funding since the mid-decade. Any apparent edge by the Soviets would evaporate very soon.<sup>19</sup> While historians have applauded Eisenhower for his restraint in the face of the Gaither Report, his administration's policy as shaped by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles stood on the principle of "massive retaliation," that is, a threat to respond to Communist provocations if necessary with nuclear weapons carried by a fleet of more than 1,500 bombers in the Strategic Air Command.

In the dawning thermonuclear missile age, dissenters lodged comfortably within the establishment began to deem "massive retaliation" a terrible danger. One of the new species of strategy intellectuals, Bernard Brodie, an economist who taught at the Yale Institute of International Studies, joined RAND in the 1950s and advocated a policy shift away from first-strike threats to a large second-strike force capable of "detering" rather than obliterating adversaries. Herman Kahn was part of that cohort of strategists, arguing in favor of maintaining a viable second-strike threat, made compelling, he argued, only if Americans were indeed prepared for the possibility of engaging in nuclear war. Kahn argued that nuclear war, rather than ending all life, was in fact winnable and survivable. Such arguments—and proposals for a vigorous "civil defense" program of fallout shelters and other assurances to the public—drew widespread opposition from critics of the arms race.

Reinhold Niebuhr had earlier broached the issue of nuclear weapons as he contemplated the stature of the United States "now [that] we are immersed in world-wide responsibilities."<sup>20</sup> In his 1952 book, *The Irony of American History*, Niebuhr pursued the arguments for a Christian "realism" he had developed since the late 1930s: in his terms, "innocency" or a denial of all humans' capacity for evil was the opposite of "responsibility." The latter inevitably entailed facing ambiguity and at times, "tragically" making choices to sacrifice some moral principles in order to achieve good ends deemed more

urgent. Irony rather than tragedy was Niebuhr's key term, however: irony flowed, perhaps even inadvertently, from our "good" or "virtuous" actions when humans imagined themselves to be godlike, assuming their "good" intentions to be perfect and infallible. It was that tendency to hubris, yielding arrogance and fanaticism, that produced the greatest moral dangers, of which the "noxious" communist doctrine was the chief example.

In the face of such dangers, Niebuhr advocated the "virtues" of responsibility, accepting the use of lesser evils, even deeply immoral means, to further good ends. Niebuhr's conclusions were two-sided. On the one hand, he denounced "idealists" who imagined world government could bring peace and pacifists who renounced war; he wrote: "Though confident of its virtue, [our civilization] must yet hold atomic bombs ready for use so as to prevent a possible world conflagration. It may actually make the conflict the more inevitable by this threat; and yet it cannot abandon the threat." On the other hand, he warned that the heritage of "innocency" left "a deep layer of Messianic consciousness in the mind of America," itself a source of evils stemming from "inordinate" ambitions. Although his own definitions of communism as a "demonic religio-political creed" verged on a Manichaean view of the "world struggle," he cautioned against such strident divisions. Apparently targeting the Far Right in American politics, he identified that error with those Americans who "become impatient and want to use the atomic bomb . . . not only to put an end to the recalcitrance of our foes but to eliminate the equivocal attitudes of the Asian and other peoples, who are not as clearly our allies as we should like them to be."<sup>21</sup>

In the mid-1950s, a religious opposition to the Cold War and the possession of nuclear arms emerged more clearly into view, challenging Niebuhr. Among its chief exponents were long-time pacifists Dorothy Day, founder of the radically egalitarian and communitarian Catholic Worker movement, and A. J. Muste, Protestant minister and head of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Day and Muste applied principles of nonviolent civil disobedience, drawn from Gandhi and Thoreau, to nuclear issues, beginning with their refusal in 1955 to "take cover" in New York City's mandatory "civil defense" drills. In 1956, Muste launched *Liberation* magazine in collaboration with an archo-pacifist Dave Dellinger, independent Marxist Sidney Lens, and others, declaring that the nuclear arms race made the Cold War superpowers "two sides of the same threat to the survival of civilization," both resting on hyperconcentrated power and social oppression that could only be challenged by "revolutionary" means. For Muste and his colleagues, and contrary to Niebuhr, "responsibility" demanded their personal refusal to cooperate with

the governmental organs of mass destruction. While advocating unilateral nuclear disarmament by the United States, they were far from “isolationists”; their internationalism led them to collaborate with West African opponents of French nuclear tests and to undertake a “San Francisco-to-Moscow Walk for Peace” over six thousand miles and 310 days. In the centering language of the time, *Liberation* called for a return “to root traditions from which we derive our values and standards,” namely, the “Judeo-Christian prophet tradition.” Mounting a view of realism contrary to Niebuhr’s, Muste argued that “even if we are destined in our lifetime to be a tiny and harassed and seemingly irrelevant minority,” contemporary prophets could demonstrate that the existing, militarized age was “not permanent, not real. It is a house built on sand.”<sup>22</sup>

In 1957, a new Committee for Non-Violent Action affiliated with *Liberation* organized civil disobedience by small groups trespassing on nuclear weapons testing sites. The same year, mathematical biologist Anatol Rapoport and economist Kenneth Boulding (an active Quaker along with his wife, Elise Boulding) began publishing the academic *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, with a wide-ranging mandate: “We prefer peace to war and the creative conflicts that move toward resolution to uncreative conflicts which lead to mental breakdown in the individual, disintegration of the family, disruption of the organization, factionalism in the political unit, and mass destruction of life and property on the international scale.”<sup>23</sup> Joined by political scientist J. David Singer, a war veteran, world federalist, and leader of the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, they established the University of Michigan’s Center for Research in Conflict Resolution, which served unofficially as a gathering place for student dissenters for the subsequent decade.

Tepid revivals of the late-1940s cosmopolitan ethos appeared in American popular culture during these years. The 1958 movie version of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein’s 1949 musical *South Pacific* proved to be one highly ambiguous expression of this return. Hammerstein, the lyricist in the partnership, had promoted racial equality in league with Popular Front activists in the 1930s and served as vice president of United World Federalists in the late 1940s. But the movie seamlessly merged those sentiments with an implicit but clear endorsement of US world power. Based on James Michener’s wartime *Tales of the South Pacific*, the movie sets the character Nellie Forbush, an American nurse from Little Rock, Arkansas, among US sailors in Polynesian islands awaiting a major offensive against the Japanese. The nurse meets and falls in love with an older French planter, Emile De Becque, belatedly discovering his mixed-race children with a deceased native

woman. The key drama involves her recoil from the planter and his children, evidently rooted in white American bigotry, and her successful effort to overcome it. The movie ends not only with a successful military mission turning the tide in the Pacific war but also with the achievement of love and family harmony as Nellie embraces the role of mother to Emile's children—a signal, as critic Christina Klein points out, that Americans will remain in the Pacific as an ostensibly nurturing (maternal) force among subordinate peoples of color, in league with remnants of French colonialism. The message was just ambiguous enough that liberals hailed *South Pacific's* lesson in tolerance, the State Department promoted the film to counter the negative world publicity of the 1957 Little Rock desegregation crisis, and Georgia legislators denounced it as propaganda for left-wing integrationism.<sup>24</sup>

Elsewhere in the arts, renewed critical energies inspired an increasingly sharp political satire voiced by a new breed of comedians. They were part of a bohemian scene that had germinated since the late 1940s in San Francisco's North Beach district, New York's Greenwich Village, and college towns like Berkeley: taverns that hosted poetry readings and small, basement clubs that featured jazz bands and stand-up comics known for irreverent, off-beat, or off-color routines. The new satire ran the gamut from the liberal wit of Mort Sahl, a young veteran mocking Joseph McCarthy and President Eisenhower in West Coast venues of the mid-1950s, to the increasingly provocative, sometimes scabrous monologues of Lenny Bruce in the early 1960s.<sup>25</sup> Somewhere in between lay piano-player and songwriter Tom Lehrer, who often focused attention on bitter parodies of the missile age, such as his 1959 number "We Will All Go Together When We Go":

We will all go together when we go.  
All suffused with an incandescent glow.  
No one will have the endurance  
To collect on his insurance,  
Lloyd's of London will be loaded when we go.<sup>26</sup>

Lehrer, a Harvard-educated mathematician who had done some work at the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory in 1952, recalled the Nazi engineers of the V-2 rocket as he mocked the arms race in the early 1960s:

Gather 'round while I sing you of Wernher von Braun  
A man whose allegiance  
Is ruled by expedience  
Call him a Nazi, he won't even frown  
"Nazi, Schmazi!" says Wernher von Braun

Don't say that he's hypocritical  
 Say rather that he's apolitical  
 "Once the rockets are up, who cares where they come down?  
 That's not my department!" says Wernher von Braun

Some have harsh words for this man of renown  
 But some think our attitude  
 Should be one of gratitude  
 Like the widow and cripples in old London town  
 Who owe their large pensions to Wernher von Braun.

### **The World Vision of Cold War Liberalism and Its Critique**

The arms race would play a central role in partisan politics from the 1958 midterm elections, which brought a significant number of "liberal" Democrats into Congress, to John Kennedy's presidential campaign in 1960. Congressional Democrats assailed the Eisenhower administration for not spending enough on a rocket program to catch up with and overtake the Soviets; Kennedy not only talked about the so-called missile gap but also blamed Eisenhower's fiscal restraint for the sluggishness of the American economy following the 1958 recession. Since many liberal critics had long challenged the nuclear "brinkmanship" of Secretary of State Dulles, the 1960 Democratic campaign had a peculiar, ambivalent stance, drawing both ardent Cold Warriors calling for more defense spending and liberal advocates of disarmament to Kennedy's side. Very much in tune with the two-sided character of American hegemony since 1948, when Harry Truman combined military build-up with promises of social welfare at home and assistance for economic development abroad, Kennedy's new administration in 1961 alternatively emphasized anticommunist "vigor" in fighting the Cold War and enlightened American leadership in the pursuit of global harmony. Kennedy initiated a Peace Corps and proposed to follow up on Truman's Point Four program to bring the poor postcolonial countries up to modern standards. Ostensibly squaring the circle by combining combat readiness and beneficent cosmopolitanism, the Kennedy administration marked the high point of a program that social scientists called "modernization."

Through the 1950s, US social scientists tried to systematize knowledge of how societies "became modern" in the expectation that poor decolonizing countries would soon see steady improvements in social welfare, national autonomy, and political freedom. To imagine a universal advance to liberal

modernity, modeled by scientific analysis and thus *guided* to fruition, meant departing from prior Euro-American notions of fixed racial hierarchies limiting the achievements of dominated peoples. Modernization theory also grew from Keynesian-based “growth economics” fashioned by reformers in the wake of the Great Depression. Truman’s Point Four, however meager its funding, and the economic successes of the Marshall Plan in Western Europe further implied prospects for worldwide economic uplift. At the same time, new UN agencies examining the means of economic progress added other dimensions to the variegated field of modernization theory, including analyses of differential growth rates in rich and poor countries developed by the innovative Argentinian economist Raul Prebisch, head of the UN’s Economic Commission for Latin America.<sup>27</sup>

In the hands of American social scientists, however, “modernization” was very largely a program of US world leadership that bore marks of longstanding Western hubris. American modernization theory suggested a straight path of progress, valid for all, that led to an endpoint identified with the societies of Western Europe and the United States. Theorists promised economic growth and popular, consumer-based prosperity; national consolidation in stable centralized states; a pacific civil society fostering rational debate about public policy; steady technological innovation and respect for science as an objective basis for understanding the world; the conjugal family and free marital choice; and cosmopolitan values that provided means of managing a degree of international harmony sufficient to suppress aggressive war. Against these standards lay a whole set of antitheses marking what was “premodern” or “backward”: tradition; localism; “tribal,” “communal,” or confessional identities; civil violence; antiscientific prejudices; illiteracy; fixed hierarchies; and government by closed elites.

All those terms were loaded. The developed world’s attributes were idealized, hardly an accurate description of how those societies actually operated or had emerged in recent centuries, and the list of “backward” disabilities was arbitrary. What counts as tradition, irrationality, and provincialism lay in the eye of the beholder. One think tank identified “requirements of sharing income with the family” as an obstacle that traditionalism placed across the road to modernity, as if only self-interested, autonomous economic actors could be modern. The same sharing principle might instead strike others as an adaptive practice useful to members of poor communities—or even as a kind of value-orientation toward collective action that could shape development in a mode different than what “the West” put on offer.<sup>28</sup>

As social theory, “modernization” bore key traits: *universalism* (setting standards presumed to apply to all cases without particular distinctions);

*linearity and evolutionism* (a single course of change, marked by gradual movement through successive stages of development, admitting no alternative or divergent paths); *teleology* (a clear, foreseeable goal lying at the end of that course); and *recapitulation* (the same steps traversed by those already advanced had set the pattern for all who followed). These theoretical traits had roots in longstanding Western European and North American thoughtways, dating back to the moral self-righteousness and classical political economy of bourgeois elites in the Victorian age of equipoise. That heritage fostered an assortment of “civilizing missions” boasted by colonial powers claiming racial-cultural superiority over others; by the mid-twentieth century, this heritage was qualified once more at least by lip service to ideals of racial equality deemed fitting to a decolonizing world. Moreover, the achievement of liberal welfare states in Western Europe and the United States lent the old bourgeois ideal of growth a social-democratic veneer. Thus significant numbers of liberal or even left-leaning intellectuals could embrace the modernizing program and see India’s constitutional declaration of its status as a “Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic” as part of the progressive trend of the times. In any case, the universalism, linearity, and teleology of modernization theory fit the centered disposition of the era nicely: the very heart of Progress could be neatly grasped in these terms.

The intersection of ideas and political power is always hard to describe very precisely, no less than the relation between professed ideals and their application in practice. In *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1960), Kennedy adviser Walt Rostow built an argument that anticommunist foreign policy and modernization of the poor world were conjoined, but the relative weight of the two remained in question. Kennedy’s promise of aid to uplift the masses in Latin America through the Alliance for Progress stood as the beneficent side of a policy also geared to suppress revolutionary movements there—by providing aid to right-wing military dictatorships if necessary, which actually took precedence. Still, as historian Michael Latham argues, modernization theory served as the central ideology of Kennedy’s foreign policy.<sup>29</sup>

Given uncertainty about the balance of ideals and practice in US foreign policy, a number of American scholars already by 1960 came to voice doubts about “modernization” as a program capable of satisfying the aspirations of the peoples emerging in the decolonizing world. Just as George Kahin had discovered in Indonesia in 1949, decolonization was bound to be a turbulent process in which the United States often played a duplicitous or even antagonistic part. In the bipolar Cold War world, the “neutralism” professed by the anticolonial nationalists meeting at Bandung struck Eisenhower and



Dulles as a threat, and their rejection of neutralism remained, for all intents and purposes, the policy of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

By this time, a “third camp” position critical of both Soviet and American power regained some purchase in intellectual life, at least among some of the younger academics focused on the politics and cultures of decolonization. Anthropologist Stanley Diamond, a veteran of a left-wing group of Columbia graduate students in the late 1940s who jovially called themselves the Mundial Upheaval Society (MUS), worked in West Africa. In the early 1960s, Diamond assailed US foreign policy for “echo[ing] the heritage of colonialism” as it turned hostile to the radical nationalist, pan-African, and collectivist policies of new states such as Ghana and maneuvered against Congo’s Patrice Lumumba on misguided anticommunist grounds.<sup>30</sup> “We are always dealing with history,” Diamond wrote one of his mentors, Columbia anthropologist Julian Steward, and “it could be a mistake to assume that certain processes which seem universal cannot be modified, changed, or [rejected] by large enough groups of people so as to alter the structure which emerges. I am not at all certain about the ‘inevitable’ direction of West African society . . . [for] to assume that they all unroll toward Westernization or Sovietization is to play fast and loose with history.”<sup>31</sup> Two other MUS anthropologists, Marshall Sahlins and Elman Service, published a slim volume, *Evolution and Culture*, that asserted, “A world-wide conflict [has commenced] between older, entrenched social orders and once-lowly and dominated peoples whose awakening has made ‘progress’ again the slogan of the day.”<sup>32</sup> Clearly, the “progress” they had in mind was one that “dominated peoples” defined for themselves. That sensibility evoked the ostensible neutralism of Bandung, welcoming paths of development chosen by oppressed people “find[ing] their own voice,” as Eric R. Wolf put it, and assuming new forms apart from the bipolar choice between Soviet or American models of modernization.<sup>33</sup>

The revival of “third camp” or “third force” ideologies stemmed from a confluence of events and trends across the world that spurred new protests and brought new actors to the fore in the politics of the Cold War and the politics of intellectual life. Across Europe, West and East, dissenters challenged the leaders of both blocs. When France and Britain joined with Israel to attack Egypt in an attempt to reverse Gamal Abdel Nasser’s nationalization of the Suez Canal, protesters condemned the action as resurgent colonialism; when the Soviet Union crushed a popular uprising in Hungary, disenchanted leftists condemned Communist tyranny. Neither Moscow nor Washington: radical intellectuals in Western Europe began talking of a

“New Left” rising in opposition to both camps, particularly aimed against the threat of nuclear war. Across the divided continent, Polish intellectuals fared somewhat better than Hungarian rebels, fashioning a doctrine of “socialist humanism” to challenge their own government in the name of democracy. Americans engaged all these currents. The sociologist C. Wright Mills traveled widely, familiarizing himself with the leftists of Mexico City who heartily welcomed the 1959 Cuban Revolution, leading lights of the British New Left and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), and the dissidents of the Eastern bloc. The pacifist Bayard Rustin traveled to Ghana, the first African “new state” south of the Sahara, to join a CND protest (supported by Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah) against French nuclear testing in French West Africa, sustaining Bandung’s claim that the “non-aligned” bloc brought formerly colonized peoples into world affairs as a peace bloc. Mills was one of the first intellectuals to seize on this multisided insurgency as a worldwide New Left that allied young Western intellectuals with rebels carrying the aspirations for progress among the poor peoples of what he called “the hungry bloc.”

Mills did not yet have the term *third world* at his disposal. That phrase had first emerged in France in the early 1950s as a name for the decolonizing world, meant to imply independence of the bipolar Cold War as well as the egalitarian, democratic heritage of the French revolution’s “third estate.” The British anthropologist Peter Worsley, active in CND and the New Left, translated the term into English when he published *The Third World* in 1964.<sup>34</sup> But even in the early 1950s, the world federalist Robert Redfield asked, “Is it not true that the individually led creativity in the moral order comes not from the people who are in the *center* of the expanding civilization and who have the power, but from people who feel themselves outside it?”<sup>35</sup> He noted that “the East today is in revolt” and “mankind is on the move again,” prefiguring the claims Sahlins and Service made in 1960, welcoming the “awakening” of “once-lowly and dominated peoples” as a sign that horizons of historical change had reopened. In fact, Redfield had already suggested, in ways subtly challenging mainstream modernization theory, that some *off-center* force might play the role of instigating that change. Paradoxically, the widening of world affiliation in a universalist and centered mode could subtly give way to a decentering move, or at least a tendency to criticize US strength “at the center.”

Martin Luther King Jr. also stood for a notion of moral rejuvenation inspired in part by the anticolonial movements. In the midst of the Montgomery bus boycott that brought him to national attention in 1956, he declared:

Now this determination on the part of the Negro to struggle and to struggle, until segregation and discrimination have passed away, springs from the same longing for human dignity that motivates oppressed peoples all over the world. This is not only a nation in transition, but this is a world in transition. There are approximately two billion four hundred million people in this world, and the vast majority of these people live in Asia and Africa. . . . and over the years most of these people have lived under the pressing yoke of some foreign power. . . . But now they are gradually gaining their freedom. . . . The struggle of the Negro is a part of this great struggle all over the world.<sup>36</sup>

By the end of the midcentury period, that struggle within and beyond US borders would lead King to the nation's center, speaking on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at the March on Washington on August 28, 1963. His famous "I Have a Dream" speech purposefully welded the freedom dream of the civil rights movement to the promised "American dream" of equality and individuality. King's rhetorical choices may have misled listeners—those on the Right who would afterward twist his words into a libertarian credo and those on the Left who would decry his accommodation to middle-class liberalism—to miss the sharp challenges he posed. The marchers that day, he said, had assembled "to dramatize a shameful condition," to mark "the fierce urgency of now," and to warn Americans that "the whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright days of justice emerge."<sup>37</sup>

In the last years of the midcentury period, those whirlwinds signaled that history was open again, bound to be both promising and treacherous.

## CHAPTER EIGHT



# A Phase Change

The last book written by the distinguished medieval historian Jacques Le Goff, published posthumously, asked *Must We Divide History into Periods?* Unsatisfied with the conventional division between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Le Goff found medieval features lasting until the 1760s—a proposition one reviewer mocked as a very “long Middle Ages” indeed.<sup>1</sup> One might think of our view as a “long 1950s,” but we would rather not. Decades, despite their convenience, are not the best historical markers, and “the fifties” is so burdened with contrasting nostalgia and recriminations that, as a historical concept, it might well be surrendered. We have defined our time period a bit differently, from the first high pitch of Cold War/Red Scare tensions to the significant uptick in 1963 of black militancy combined with signs of a coming debacle in Vietnam. This counts, in its own right, as a meaningful historical period and not merely as an interregnum between other, more striking events. Insofar as “interregnum” suggests something colorless, as if biding time, we hope on the contrary to have shown these years to be rich with events and achievements intellectual and cultural. Yet as a concession to Le Goff’s argument, we admit that this period was not dramatically set off from what came before and after. What metaphors do we have, aside from a sharp change in direction (the turn of a steering wheel), to imagine the ways one historical period gives way to another? Perhaps a “change of phase”—a substance changing form from solid to liquid to gas or vice versa—will do, or a picture of something precipitating out of solution.<sup>2</sup> In the years subsequent to the midcentury, those typically dubbed “the sixties,” many of the same

conditions prevailed, and trends begun in the 1950s continued on a trajectory seemingly already set. One way to think of the change in American intellectual and cultural history, rather than as a decided rupture, would recognize a kind of phase change, shifting the priority given to centered or decentered modes of thought.

Such period shifts are always full of ambiguity, when persisting or residual trends seem to mix with new, emergent phenomena.<sup>3</sup> Determining where, or in what historical period, something fits is tricky business. Thus the early 1960s revealed many developments that bore the characteristics of the midcentury period while also opening doors to a new one. To make sense of these events and trends, let us distinguish those that might be considered culminations, having germinated throughout the midcentury period even if they flowered just at its end; revivals, picking up on older themes that lay fallow for much of the period; and innovations, marking the appearance of something new that would become more characteristic of later years.

### Culminations

In intellectual and cultural history, we always deal with time lag and transitional phenomena: creative motives may spark in one moment and then, maturing over a considerable period of time in virtually a subterranean way, issue in a product whose force both masks its own origins and stimulates a younger generation to take fruitful ideas further. Thus a number of salient works by Jane Jacobs, Rachel Carson, and Thomas Kuhn appeared early in the new decade that would later seem, in retrospect, to have set off “the sixties” when they were just as surely products of “the fifties.”

Jane Jacobs’s *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) appeared to be a thunderbolt of damning criticism aimed against ideas of centralized planning (and large-scale, high-rise apartment blocks) associated with the theory and practice of modern urbanism since the 1930s. In its defense of local neighborhoods that evolved in ecological fashion to maintain a mix of small-scale apartment buildings, merchants, and active street life, Jacobs’s book heralded a rebirth of “community” at the dawn of the 1960s. As historian Samuel Zipp has shown, however, Jacobs herself emerged from a milieu of self-consciously “modernist” advocates of public housing who came quickly to recognize where the postwar design of concentrated low-income housing towers had gone wrong.<sup>4</sup> An editor of the prestigious magazine *Architectural Forum*, as well as a board member of the Union Settlement House, which had long backed public housing in East Harlem, New York, Jacobs started collaborating in 1955 with local social worker Ellen Lurie, East Harlem residents, and community

activists eager to make public housing a success. They all knew the new tall “dormitory”-like buildings—surrounded by empty green spaces—left renters with a “high degree of isolation,” lacking “any natural centers of activity the way the old neighborhood had the businesses, the natural gathering places, the grocery stores, the barber shops, [and] social clubs.”<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, the new critics had a sense of “centers”—here, a notion of “natural gathering places”—different from that of “centralized” developers such as New York City’s master planner Robert Moses. Their skepticism of planners, however, did not entail desertion of their commitment to public provision of social benefits like good housing. By 1961, Jacobs would draw a blunt contrast between the “strips of chaos” she admired in old, undisturbed neighborhood streets and “our [over-planned] concept of urban order,” suggesting to later readers that she favored the dissonant, liberated, and “natural” styles more associated with “the sixties.”<sup>6</sup> Yet the initial critique she had embraced in the mid and late 1950s, denouncing the housing projects as a “new mass way of life,” clearly evoked midcentury fears that “mass” phenomena had supplanted vital social relations, community, and civic engagement, leaving human isolation, alienation, or anomie in their wake. In fact, the “mass” or the crowd, in midcentury thought, was *not* a centered phenomenon: as Arendt and others saw it, “mass society” was structureless, unorganized, lacking order and a center. Thus Jacobs made clear that she objected to “the dishonest mask of pretended order” fostered by the great planners and developers of “urban renewal,” a phony order “achieved by ignoring or suppressing the real order that is struggling to exist and be served.”<sup>7</sup>

Jacobs’s notion of “slowly grown public relationships” that fashioned a street-level “order” bore clear similarities to ideas of urban ecology associated with one of Jacobs’s inspirations, the so-called Chicago school of sociology begun in city ethnographies of the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>8</sup> The literary scholar George Hutchinson has noted that the term *ecology* first emerged in those years, often in collaborations of biologists and social theorists; it really burst into public usage in the 1940s as conservationists and preservationists resumed their activism after World War II and began referring as well to “ecosystems.” At that time, Hutchinson writes, “Ecological threat pervade[d] much of the decade’s literature,” from poetry and novels to so-called nature writing.<sup>9</sup> At the beginning of our midcentury period, naturalist Aldo Leopold published *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), which advanced a “land ethic” situating human life *within* natural environments wherein “an individual [human or otherwise] is a member of community of interdependent parts.” The “unity” of diverse component parts was, for Leopold, the “essential [ethical] truth” of nature and human social organization as well.<sup>10</sup>

Such notions blossomed in postwar international organizations such as UNESCO, whose scientists nurtured the idea of world cosmopolitanism (for science itself, they believed, was by its nature profoundly transnational and global) along with concern over ecological crisis. That concern often expressed itself in first-world Malthusian suspicion of third-world peoples and their ways, with scientists citing overpopulation in poor lands as the source of mass poverty and environmental decay.<sup>11</sup> Although many environmentalists in the 1940s and 1950s recognized the devastation wrought by Western industrial development, the growing postwar focus on uplifting “developing” nations—too often predicated on old imperial views of backward peoples—provided one means of displacing ecological worries to population growth elsewhere that would outstrip, they thought, or ineptly waste resources.

Scientist and journalist Rachel Carson, whose work evolved throughout the midcentury years until her most influential book, *Silent Spring*, was published in 1962, instead kept the focus right on the American way of life. That is not to say there was anything provincial about her work; she shared fully in the postwar celebration of science as a transnational project, devoted in principle to world comity. In her major books of the 1940s and 1950s, particularly her best seller *The Sea Around Us* (1950), she cited the work of research institutes abroad—particularly in the Scandinavian countries, which at that time played an outsized role in the culture of scientific cosmopolitanism. The very title of her book suggested the deep and broad contextualism of ecological literature, and Carson led readers on a world tour from the Barents Sea to the Mediterranean, from the sea canyon off the Congo coast to that lying beyond the mouth of the Ganges, from the west coast of South America to Polynesia, from the story of the dodo bird on Mauritius to varied invasive flora and fauna brought across great stretches of the world by modern navigation and resettlement. She described the expanse of natural interaction in global and superterrestrial terms, remarking after a note on the tides, “In theory, there is a gravitational attraction between every drop of sea water and even the outermost star of the universe.” More practically, she addressed the role of the oceans as a “global thermostat” in the long history of world climate variation over time (including the warming of the Arctic begun “about 1900” and becoming “astonishingly marked about 1930”). In the final section of the book, titled “Man and the Sea About Him,” Carson described a long history of extracting minerals from the sea, culminating in recent deep-water oil wells, in passages that express no acute “environmentalist” concern.<sup>12</sup>

The success of *The Sea Around Us*, winner of the National Book Award, enabled Carson to leave her government job with the Fish and Wildlife

Service (FWS) and devote herself entirely to her writing and observations of marine life. After publishing her next book, *The Edge of the Sea*, in 1955, her attention turned to the “ocean of air” above us, the atmosphere: she wrote a script for a popular science television show on clouds around the same time of growing public awareness of the threat of nuclear fallout, following the spate of hydrogen bomb test explosions that began in 1954. Within a few years, Carson would also return to an ecological threat she had recognized as early as 1947, when government studies first warned about the grave dangers that the insecticide DDT, widely considered one of the great achievements of wartime science, posed to fish and wildlife. Despite repeated warnings by FWS scientists, the US Department of Agriculture continued to promote the use of synthetic insecticides on crops and undertook its own large-scale spraying campaigns against fire ants in the Southeast and gypsy moths in the Northeast. By this time, DDT use at far higher levels than recommended had become almost ubiquitous. Fear of its effects began to register in popular culture, such as the 1957 horror movie *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, which suggested that a combination of insecticides and radiation could kill humans. Following all this news with growing alarm, Carson was galvanized into action by her sympathy with a group of Long Island residents suing to stop DDT spraying in their area in 1958. Carson came to the conclusion that ecologies did not always heal themselves and a new age of human capacity to drastically change nature itself had dawned. Her prospective book on pesticides once had the working title *Man Against the Earth*.<sup>13</sup>

By the time Carson finished the book, first appearing in serial form in *The New Yorker* over the summer of 1962, it had achieved its famous title. Carson opened with a scenario of a once-beautiful, fruitful, small American town that experienced “a strange stillness,” a “spring without voices.” A coating of white powder that had “fallen like snow” on the houses coincided with the disappearance of birds. For metaphoric purposes, she had likened insecticides to fallout, aptly as it turned out since the Soviet Union and United States had resumed atmospheric bomb tests that year after a brief moratorium. Book publication came in the fall, and *Silent Spring* entered the best-seller list in the week of October when the Cuban Missile Crisis was at its height. Carson’s rhetoric was sharp and indeed alarmed as she discussed “man’s assaults upon the environment . . . the contamination of air, earth, rivers and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials,” where “chemicals are the sinister and little-recognized partners of radiation in changing the very nature of the world—the very nature of its life.”<sup>14</sup> Despite virulent attacks on the integrity of Carson’s research by farming interests and the chemical industry (and an FBI investigation of Carson for subversive associations), her conclusions



were considered compelling by Kennedy's science adviser Jerome Wiesner and Interior Secretary Stewart Udall (but not by the surgeon general or the Food and Drug Administration). If the rhetoric of *Silent Spring* evoked the apocalyptic mood some writers had evoked at the beginning of our midcentury period, her analysis also reflected the period's holistic emphasis—in the determined ecological view, as one of Carson's biographers put it, that if you “poison one corner of the environment . . . you risk poisoning the whole thing.”<sup>15</sup> Coincidentally, another pathbreaking ecological book, *Our Synthetic Environment* by Murray Bookchin (writing under the pseudonym Lewis Herber), also appeared in 1962, though its origins stretched back to an article on “The Problem of Chemicals in Food” that Bookchin published in 1952.<sup>16</sup>

Although accused of dismissing scientific progress and wanting to turn back the clock on technological advances, Carson proposed no such thing. She based her warnings on what she regarded as sound research, admitted the possibility of using synthetic chemicals to good effect in specific cases, and urged primarily a sense of caution and humility before nature's order. Her arguments were not intended to rebuke science. Likewise, another landmark publication of 1962, Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, sometimes seen in retrospect as commencing a new age of doubt concerning science's truth value, was also as an outgrowth of the “centering” disposition of midcentury scientific culture.

Kuhn, born 1922, had been educated in a Connecticut preparatory school that was both elite and “progressive” in the sense of building on John Dewey's pedagogy. He entered Harvard in 1940 intending to study physics and continued there with graduate work in the field; soon he was drawn into the new program in “general education” propounded by Harvard president James Bryant Conant and encoded in the so-called Red Book introducing the new college curriculum in 1945, one of the most salient postwar initiatives to nurture a “common culture” that would provide a secure grounding, a center, for a “free society.” For Conant, a chemist who had served as chairman of the wartime National Defense Research Committee and knew firsthand the deepening ties between scientific research and public affairs, a common culture should, as historian Joel Isaac writes, ensure “the transmission of an appreciation of the place of science in the humanist tradition.”<sup>17</sup> New courses in the history of science (primarily aimed at nonscientists, the general run of college students) were to be a key part of the new program, and Kuhn joined as instructor in the history of physics. Kuhn's own intellectual biography—his keen interests not only in physics but also philosophy and literary studies—suited him perfectly to the synthetic, integrative thrust of interdisciplinary scholarship. He also inherited a distinctive Harvard ap-

proach to understanding science that had been percolating since the 1920s: a generally post-Kantian view that each scientific discipline depended on a central “conceptual scheme” shared by its practitioners. Thus “fact” was never utterly independent of “theory.”

Kuhn wove his way through various influences at Harvard, including the sociological theory of Talcott Parsons—emphasizing a “consensus” of “shared values” that governed professional communities—as well as midcentury notions of the “unity of science,” in which all sciences cohered in a common method. These notions alone, however, did not quite capture how science and scientists actually worked, in Kuhn’s view. He spent much of the 1950s troubling over what he thought was the historical character of change in scientific knowledge—that is, how more or less coherent views of natural reality prevailed for periods of time and then sometimes changed radically into alternative formulations—from Newtonian to Einsteinian physics, for instance.

In his 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn famously argued that such a set of prevailing assumptions in a scientific field constituted a “paradigm,” which guided what most scientists did most of the time (what he called “normal science”). At certain transformative moments, when a paradigm had been well-played out but left certain “anomalous” facts unexplained, a new “revolutionary” theory (like Einstein’s) could intervene with a significantly different picture of the world. The new view made sense of those anomalies but often met ardent resistance from scientists trained under the prior dispensation.

What was a “paradigm”? It wasn’t quite intellectual “consensus,” for scientists, Kuhn wrote, “never learn concepts, laws, and theories by themselves. Instead these intellectual tools are from the start encountered in a historically and pedagogically prior unit that displays them with and through their applications.” And further: “The process of learning a theory depends upon the study of the applications, including practice problem solving both with a pencil and paper and with instruments in the laboratory.”<sup>18</sup> This was, Isaac shows, a version of the idea that had long been germinating among Conant and his Harvard associates, depicting science in effect as what scientists do, stemming from their practical training through instructive case studies that convey ways to pose questions and “puzzle” out their answers. What Kuhn added was a social-psychological perspective that suggested that scientists, like old dogs, have trouble learning new tricks. A new paradigm does not fully take hold until one generation passes away and younger inquirers, educated under the models of the new paradigm, take charge. This kind of shift from one paradigm to another, each a particular “Gestalt” view of reality, was

thus “revolutionary”—an argument that Kuhn’s critics said made “normal” science look too much like dogma and undermined the view that scientific knowledge steadily advanced by a cumulative process of increasing accuracy and comprehensive understanding. Kuhn’s argument would indeed have an electrifying effect on the history and philosophy of science—read by some, mistakenly, as a new species of skepticism. However innovative the argument was, it was still more an outcome of certain dispositions characteristic of the midcentury period, particularly the desire to provide “grounding” for a common culture of knowledge making, than it was a sharp and sudden break to a new age.

### Revivals

While some of the intellectual and cultural landmarks at the end of the midcentury period appeared as culminations of brewing ideas and creative ventures, others might be regarded as returns or revivals of impulses left behind at the start of those years. Eleanor Flexner’s *Century of Struggle*, the first comprehensive history of the women’s suffrage movement, in 1959 and Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* in 1963, each in its own way represented the recovery of stirrings in women’s rights dating to the 1940s. Joseph Heller’s 1960 novel *Catch-22* invoked again the disenchanting veteran’s view that had marked the immediate postwar years. And a tentative revival in residual Popular Front sensibilities cropped up in the late 1950s, too, even as the Communist Party USA broke apart in the wake of Nikita Khrushchev’s 1956 denunciation of Stalin. The actor, concert singer, and left-wing civil rights activist Paul Robeson, who had been blacklisted for his pro-Communist views since 1950, appeared at Carnegie Hall in a comeback concert in May 1959. A younger member of the left-wing black arts milieu in Harlem, Harry Belafonte, had broken out of Red Scare constraints with a smash hit album of Calypso songs in 1956. Belafonte gave two Carnegie Hall concerts in April 1959 that reprised, in a more “pop” style, Robeson’s wide-ranging performances featuring African American, Caribbean, Jewish, and other international folk songs—a kind of left-wing multiculturalism *avant la lettre*.

The broad milieu of folk music, having gone into eclipse in the early Cold War years, also revived at that time. “Folk” had roots in the work of song collectors from the late nineteenth century on, as well as in commercial recordings and festivals of southern regional culture beginning in the 1920s.<sup>19</sup> In the 1930s, the music became associated with the Popular Front, in part because such musicians as Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger paired lyrics of protest and struggle with old melodies. Further linking the music with the

Popular Front was archivist Alan Lomax's championing the "country" blues of such practitioners as the team of Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee and Huddie Ledbetter (Lead Belly) for its authenticity as the voice of the people. Folk songs soon became a staple of performances at venues ranging from union-organizing and antifascist rallies to the racially inclusive, left-wing cabaret, Café Society, in New York. By the late 1940s, folk musicians had entered the field of popular music. Most notably, the singing group the Weavers, featuring Seeger, Lee Hays, Fred Hellerman, and Ronnie Gilbert, had a hit record in 1950 with Lead Belly's song "Goodnight, Irene," but the Red Scare blacklist shut down their access to radio shows and concert halls by 1952.<sup>20</sup>

The music's association with suppressed dissent and its aura of simplicity—signaled by its key instruments of banjo, guitar, acoustic bass, and harmonica—contributed to folk's appeal to segments of the bohemian underground. That appeal was fostered in part by the work of an eccentric collector named Harry Smith, who was equally devoted to breaking the color line and exploring esoteric mystical doctrines. In 1952, Smith issued his six-record *Anthology of American Folk Music*, culled from nearly forgotten pre-Depression platters of "race" and "hillbilly" songs. The collection would become the "bible" of the folk revival, a reservoir of hidden knowledge for such young enthusiasts as Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Dave Van Ronk, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan.<sup>21</sup> The sounds had rung through children's summer camps (especially those with a left-wing heritage) and college-town coffeehouses and in such bohemian neighborhoods as Greenwich Village and Dinkytown in Minneapolis.<sup>22</sup> The music's growing audience prompted the founder of the Newport Jazz Festival to add the Newport Folk Festival in 1959. Although the early pop stars of folk music such as the Kingston Trio (from 1957) and Peter, Paul and Mary (from 1961) gave a white veneer to the genre, the revival retained a cross-racial character. The black musician Odetta, who had begun her folk-singing career in San Francisco's basement nightclubs, the Tin Angel and the hungry i, attracted great notice with her 1957 album *Odetta Sings Ballads and Blues*, which captured the depth and passion of her singing.<sup>23</sup> Both Baez and Dylan credited her as an influence, with Dylan claiming he traded his electric guitar for an acoustic Gibson after hearing her music in a Minneapolis record store. Martin Luther King hailed her as the "Queen of American Folk Music."

By the early 1960s, critics and audiences celebrated folk music as possessing, as *New York Times* writer Robert Shelton put it, "the kind of self-expression of a quality music," especially valuable because it "was home-crafted, homemade, self-developed, free, radical."<sup>24</sup> Ostensibly stripped of

big-business glitz and heavy-handed commercial promotion, folk music induced audiences to feel part of newfound communities, drawn together not only by the music but also by informal dress and audience accompaniment of performers. After he tabled his initial rock 'n' roll aspirations, Dylan cultivated a "low folk" rough and rude manner of presentation and a penchant for political expression similar to his hero Woody Guthrie. "Woody Guthrie tore everything in his path to pieces," Dylan later recalled. He claimed that listening intently to his songs set off a "voice in my head" that told him, "So this is the game." Dylan's "protest" phase soon gave way to another inspired by Beat poetry. In "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" (1963), the two modes seemed to complement one another. Fans acclaimed the song as a chronicle of the horrors of nuclear war provoked by the recklessness of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Dylan considered his songs of that time differently: "Everything around us looked absurd—there was a certain consciousness of madness at work. . . . After a while you become aware of nothing but a culture of feeling, of black days, of schism, evil for evil, the common destiny of the human being getting thrown off course."<sup>25</sup> Or off-center.

After a stretch of Red Scare-era repression, the tentative late-1940s advances in gay community-building also showed signs of resurfacing at the end of our period, in more confident agitation by homophile groups, a burgeoning literature devoted to its members, and the growing visibility of "camp" style. "Camp" served as a means of playing with disguise, costume, self-presentation, and coded expressions of pain, pleasure, and pathos. Certain entertainments attracted special devotion in this vein due to the kinds of emotional, performative display they permitted, particularly opera (and charismatic divas), torch singing, and the like.<sup>26</sup>

The career of Judy Garland rested in part on a "camp" appeal. The child star of the 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz*, Garland reemerged as a stage singer, first in vaudeville-like routines and later as an admired vocalist, building a following especially among gay fans. That appeal had diverse sources: the enduring image from *Oz* of a child's journey through a fantastic land full of mystery and danger, the lavish production of her stage appearances, the full-throated emotionality of her singing, knowledge of her suffering under the manipulation of movie agents, unhappy marriages, and drug and alcohol addictions. Under all that pressure, Garland cracked and required a long hospital convalescence in the late 1950s. She emerged as the new decade began, giving a comeback concert at Carnegie Hall on April 23, 1961, to rapturous acclaim by her devoted fans, the recording industry (the live show became a top seller as a double LP album), and music critics. The event drew hundreds of her fan base among gay men, who rallied to cheer Garland on and share

the passionate feeling of connection she created with her audience. The scene represented an early move from the veiled sexual communities gays had maintained under pressure through the 1950s toward a slowly growing presence in public life. Garland's comeback provided an early occasion for collective coming out.

## Innovations

Aside from late-period trends that were culminations or revivals, others might be regarded as emergent phenomena—something that signaled a departure, an incipient break from the past, with a hint of dispositions that would flourish in later years. Consider a generational cohort of young black artists reaching public notice and acclaim by the early 1960s: playwright Lorraine Hansberry (1930–1965); Nina Simone (1933–2003), pianist and jazz/blues singer, whose 1959 live album *Nina Simone at Town Hall* brought her into New York's Greenwich Village spotlight and later to wider public acclaim; and LeRoi Jones (1934–2014), playwright, poet, and critic later to be known as Amiri Baraka, who published his first book of poetry in 1961 and his inventive work of theory and criticism, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, in 1963.

Written and published before Jones was yet thirty years old, *Blues People* boldly analyzed the music of the blues, and the history of jazz, as phenomena inextricably bound up with the social and cultural history of “the Negro”—from African origins, enslavement, and what Jones archly called “so-called Emancipation,” through the cultural isolation of the Jim Crow world and successive crises and wars of the twentieth century.<sup>27</sup> The book anticipated methods that later, after the 1970s, would be termed *cultural studies* or *cultural materialism*, seeing musical expression immersed in the terms of black identity and social practices, as they evolved amid the historically changing structural conditions of black experience. The book reflected Jones's ongoing shift in intellectual orientation from the 1950s bohemian avant-garde toward black nationalism. *Blues People* also moved beyond the midcentury penchant for focusing on the typical—that is, the still-common reference to “the Negro.” Already, in the aftermath of the urban migration begun in the early twentieth century, “The *Negro*, now, becomes more definitely *Negroes*,” Jones wrote, for the southern experience of “one essential uniformity, the provinciality of place, the geographical and social constant within the group, was erased.”<sup>28</sup>

At its best, Jones's analysis involved a complicated dialectic. Black experience in this country had gone through successive stages: first, in slavery,

absolute exclusion from recognition in white American culture; then, in Jim Crow separation, a kind of cultural seclusion in all-black milieus; later still, a kind of mixture, or what Jones called “the growing openness of communication with white America” by the mid-twentieth century. These made an ever-changing and multifold backdrop for the nature of black self-expression. The generalization of cultural forms across the color line played a part in the movement from blues to jazz, to be followed in Jones’s own time by a reassertion by black jazz artists of racial difference. Jones surely recognized “the hopelessly interwoven fabric of American life,” but that did not mean, he argued, that American life could be grasped in terms of a grand “assimilation” into a consistent whole.<sup>29</sup> Even as the most rigid exclusions and separations yielded over time, the black experience was one of “adaptation,” not assimilation, to “white” culture. Moreover, whatever might be considered an “indigenous American culture,” of which jazz was the most crucial sign, had to be understood as indebted to something clearly “*non-American*” in origin: first, those cultural elements of an African past, suppressed but never eliminated among slaves, and then the forms of the separate Jim Crow social-cultural world where Negroes invented the blues—its three-line pattern echoing call-and-response work songs and hymns, now given over to narratives of the lonely, itinerant search for work and relationship conveyed in inventive but searingly blunt language.

Black expressive culture revitalized itself, Jones thought, by returning again and again to the blues sensibility. Thus, “American culture” achieved its independence from Europe by drawing on non-American roots it persisted in denying. What was “American” was not in fact centered but always, in some way, off-kilter, decentered, ragged, or syncopated:

The adjustment necessary for the black man to enter completely into a “white” American society was a complete disavowal that he or *his part of the culture* had ever been anything else but American. (The cruel penalty for this kind of situation is the socio-cultural temperament of America today, where the very things that have served to erect a distinct culture on this continent are most feared and misunderstood by the majority of Americans!)<sup>30</sup>

Jones had no doubt that the “invaluable emotional history of Western art” had been incorporated and adapted by black artists, and particularly by the most innovative black jazz musicians of his time. Still, to assume that such adaptations eventuated in a synthetic whole, an American culture shared by all according to an assimilative ideal, denied the cultural difference within: the crucial Afro-American element. Insisting on such wholesale assimila-

tion led only to “the sinister vapidness of mainline [not authentic] American culture.”<sup>31</sup>

*Blues People* was severely reprovved by Ralph Ellison, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, who charged Jones with bungling a great theme. “Any viable theory of Negro American culture—which I agree exists—obligates us to fashion a more adequate theory of American culture as a whole,” Ellison wrote, recognizing as he had years before in his critique of Gunnar Myrdal the fallacy of any simple vision of a unitary, assimilative Americanism. Ellison nonetheless resisted what he saw as the “separatist” strains of Jones’s analysis. It was precisely the complex mix of cultural expression across racial lines that made it impossible to sharply sever aspects of the whole: “white Americans,” however blinded by racism, “have been walking Negro walks, talking Negro flavored talk (and prizing it when spoken by southern belles), dancing Negro dancing and singing Negro melodies far too long to talk of a ‘mainstream’ of American culture to which they’re alien.”<sup>32</sup>

Yet Jones, more preoccupied with the schisms running through American experience, aptly captured a rising mood in black consciousness, one evident at that moment in the evolution of jazz. While it has become conventional wisdom, since the 1960s, that American jazz derived primarily from black musical invention, Jones reminded his readers how often white performers had seized the mantle as its leading apostles. The first recordings of jazz in 1917 were made by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, a white group, Jones noted: “By 1920, Paul Whiteman was making millions as ‘King of Jazz’ . . . With such displays as Whiteman’s Aeolian Hall concert, complete with ‘European Style’ orchestra and Heifetz and Rachmaninoff in the audience, jazz had rushed into the mainstream without so much as one black face.”<sup>33</sup> Despite the rise of Louis Armstrong as the creator of the improvisatory jazz solo, and the storied large jazz bands of Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie, *Life* magazine reported on jazz and the swing dance associated with it in two large features, in 1938 and 1943; both the covers and opening pages of the articles were devoted entirely to white musicians and dancers, adding black artists afterward as if they occupied a special, subordinate corner of this white-led cultural field.<sup>34</sup> By the 1950s, Dave Brubeck’s appearance on the cover of *Time* magazine and the popularity of a West Coast, white “cool” jazz (most notably, the trumpeter Chet Baker) overshadowed even the one who gave “birth to the cool,” Miles Davis.

The Newport Jazz Festival, beginning in 1954, put the emphasis on mainstreaming jazz as America’s music with still a “white” tilt. Historian Benjamin Cawthra writes that a well-known documentary film of the 1958



Newport festival, *Jazz on a Summer's Day* by photographer Bert Stern, “reinforced the notion of the festival as a kind of integrated peaceable kingdom, a haven of leisure in the affluent society, with jazz performances intercut with America’s Cup yachting footage and undercut by images of heavy-drinking young people.”<sup>35</sup> In fact, on Miles Davis’s *Miles Ahead* of 1957, Columbia Records put a photo “of a [white] woman on a racing yacht with a young boy, with blue sea and sky in the background,” infuriating Davis, who told his producer, George Avakian, to replace the cover with “a black girl on there.” Due to an early printing, up to one hundred thousand copies were sold with the yachting photo before a new photo of Davis himself became that album’s iconic cover.<sup>36</sup>

By 1960, a number of younger, vanguard black jazz musicians led by bassist Charles Mingus and drummer Max Roach sparked a secessionist movement from the Newport festival, which they felt gave privilege to big-name and white performers such as the Gerry Mulligan Big Band, the Dave Brubeck Quartet, and the Herbie Mann Sextet while ignoring new pioneers who were black. The counterfestival convened across town featuring an almost all-black roster featuring Eric Dolphy, Ornette Coleman, and Abbey Lincoln. Later that summer, an organization called the Jazz Artists’ Guild sponsored weekly concerts (without liquor served, so people actually listened) featuring many of the Newport secessionists. One reporter, writing under the title “Jazz Leaves the Plantation,” described the initiative as “the first clear-cut mass break by Negro jazz-men from their former economic strangle-holds.” Mingus had organized his own Jazz Workshop to advance his ambition to be “the most tradition-based yet experimental of thinkers” among “race-conscious” jazz musicians.<sup>37</sup> The trend led, in LeRoi Jones’s thinking, to the advent of the great “blues people” among jazz innovators of the 1960s—John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, and Cecil Taylor. It also led to a new protest music by black musicians such as Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, who recorded their *Freedom Now Suite* in 1960. Lincoln’s anguished screams and alarms punctuated the suite, expressing both pain and fury, making any smooth incorporation into a generalized American culture almost inconceivable.

Just as Jones seemed to straddle a growing bent toward racial authenticity and a continued appreciation of cultural exchange and multiplicity, so Mingus harped on “race pride” yet also clearly cherished a cosmopolitan range of musical influences and mentors, ranging from Wagner and Richard Strauss to traditions of gospel and mariachi bands.<sup>38</sup> A new kind of internationalism began to emerge. Jones’s *Blues People* relied heavily on the work of

Melville Herskovits, whose most famous work, *The Myth of the Negro Past* of 1941, founded Jones's claim that however diminished, "African survivals," or cultural traits persisting from African origins among American blacks, provided some of the distinctive styles of the blues. Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* included the character Joseph Asagai, who encourages the female protagonist, Beneatha Younger, to recognize her African heritage and move with him to Nigeria. Hansberry's Harlem of the 1950s was in fact the site of growing interest in African culture. The young Nigerian immigrant and drummer Babatunde Olatunji signed a contract with Columbia Records and issued his first album, *Drums of Passion* (1959), drawing him close to the new jazz musicians like Coltrane, who helped found Harlem's Olatunji Center for African Culture in 1964.

In Jones's analysis, it was the black soldier's experience abroad in World War I that first broadcast a new "'international' sense" that encouraged Negroes "to feel the singularity of their plight as American black men. . . . The tradition of silent acceptance had been much too stifling. It is significant that World War II produced a similar social crisis in this country."<sup>39</sup> And that too was succeeded by the Korean War, in Jones's view, the third "major catastrophe for each decade" in the young lives of his black cohort (following the Depression and world war) that broke the bounds of normality, encouraged a new disposition of "conscious nonconformity," and incited a breadth of outlook that required "Afro-American culture . . . to be reinterpreted in terms of the most profound influences in the open field of *all existing* cultures."<sup>40</sup>

Certainly, that new internationalism meant looking beyond a nationally bounded "American culture." It was a move that resonated with a new militancy born of impatience and outrage that stirred among the younger black artists by 1963 in the aftermath of Martin Luther King's Birmingham campaign and the subsequent killing of four black girls at Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church. Nina Simone's song "Mississippi Goddam" moved toward a frank embrace of the outsider's status in denouncing American culture in the large:

Oh but this whole country is full of lies  
 You're all gonna die and die like flies  
 I don't trust you any more  
 You keep on saying 'Go slow!'  
 'Go slow!'

And Jones ended *Blues People* on an internationalist note very similar to James Baldwin's conclusion of *The Fire Next Time*, published that same

year. “The most contemporary Negro music of the late fifties and sixties has again placed itself outside any mainstream consideration. . . . [something] significant of more ‘radical’ changes and re-evaluations of social and emotional attitudes toward the general environment.” For that “general environment” was in flux “as the West finds itself continuously redefining its position in the world and in need of radical reassessment of its relationships to the rest of the world.”

It is no secret that the West, and most particularly the American system, is in the position now of having to defend its values and ideas against totally hostile systems. The American Negro is being asked to defend the American system as energetically as the American white man. . . . But there is perhaps a question mark in the minds of the many poor blacks . . . and also now in the minds of many young Negro intellectuals. What is it that they are being asked to save? It is a good question, and America had better come up with an answer.<sup>41</sup>

### A Phase Change

A midcentury disposition to think in terms of centers and wholes manifested itself in many different ways but never in fact constituted all of American sensibility in that time. Desire to seize the innermost heart of the matter—be that a national culture, a healthy personality, a scientific discipline, the nature of rationality, a set of ethical universals, the basic forms of an artistic genre, or the singular linear thread that marked the course of progress—could express an attempt to overcome the vertiginous feeling spawned by cataclysms of the 1930s and 1940s or, on the contrary, confidence that the course was now clear toward achieving the best that modern ways had to offer. Both could be at work at once, or not at all; alternative views that preferred unfocused variety of expression or welcomed destabilizing challenges to settled ways also had their champions.

In any case, centeredness in thought and things was always more a matter of aspiration than fact in the mid-twentieth century. Look anywhere at intellectual and cultural life in the United States during these midcentury years and you will find many signs of difference, of things that did not fit, of marginal and even strange phenomena lurking, as it were, under the great tarpaulin of assumed American normality. Thinkers and artists of the period not infrequently recognized this perfectly well, even in the most mainstream of cultural media. James Agee and Charles Laughton’s movie *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), for instance, gave keen attention to the uncanny in American life, lying in plain sight. The movie sets the story of a serial murderer

in a setting of small-town, God-fearing family life represented by church picnics and an elderly couple's ice cream shop. The seeming order of things was already belied by the abnormal condition of a young mother (Willa) raising her children, John and Pearl, alone, due to her unemployed, penniless husband's imprisonment for two killings committed during a bank robbery. That strained condition was made more abnormal by the intrusion of a mad preacher, Harry Powell, who charms the townspeople and whose relation to the divine consists of God's putative advice on where to find susceptible widows whom he can kill for their savings. Later in the movie, the picture of Willa's unmaimed corpse sunk in the river, long hair flowing with the current as if pointing the way for her children's escape, offers a classic cinematic image. The children flee Harry Powell's grasp in a small boat through the night; camera shots and sounds of nocturnal frogs and owls appear like an eerie lullaby. Once police seize the murderous preacher, thanks to a gun-toting, devout old woman protecting John and Pearl, the townspeople whom Powell had hoodwinked turn into a lynch mob demanding his death in an angry parade of torches and pickets captured on screen like the grotesques of Hieronymous Bosch. Here is the old, weird America, subject to an arch critique in the midst of what we are accustomed to consider a complacent era.<sup>42</sup> That old America of moralistic self-deception and barely hidden resentments, some observers thought, was passing from the scene in a maturing, modern culture—though they still worried that it had more staying power than they would like.

The period 1948 to 1963 represented an American equipoise, a time when affairs seemed relatively balanced: the world power of the United States, due to economic and political hegemony, held steady—and rebellious challenges at home to the status quo had, at the start of this time, been stilled. At the end of the period, however, James Baldwin warned that the equilibrium was deceptive. In *The Fire Next Time*, as Baldwin described his meeting with the Nation of Islam's leader Elijah Muhammad in Chicago, he found the Black Muslims' profound distrust of white America not only persuasive but also even commonplace: "There is nothing new in this merciless formulation except the explicitness of its symbols and the candor of its hatred. Its emotional tone is as familiar to me as my own skin." Baldwin resisted Muhammad's idea that blacks could lift themselves wholly out of the American context; he admitted in print that he had white friends whom he loved, though he refrained from stressing that point while a guest in Muhammad's house. Yet there was no extenuating "the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them," which lay not only in the long history of relentless white violence

but also in the denial of that history in the nation's glaringly false mythology. "The American Negro has the great advantage of having never believed that collection of myths to which white Americans cling: that their ancestors were all freedom-loving heroes, that they were born in the greatest country the world has ever seen." There was what he would not forgive: "It is innocence which constitutes the crime"—not so much the naïve "innocency" that Reinhold Niebuhr thought rested on benign social conditions and opened the door to messianic arrogance but rather the willful innocence that underlies white resentment of the Negro's truth and constantly renews white striving for domination. Baldwin's indictment was as severe as LeRoi Jones's, though Baldwin asserted a resolute, if desperate hope, that a "handful" of "relatively conscious whites and relatively conscious blacks" could "end the racial nightmare, and *achieve* our country"; that is, create something yet uncreated. But time was short.<sup>43</sup>

The "fire next time" of which Baldwin warned was already stirring in 1963. He wrote of a world revolution by rising peoples of color, to whom the United States must accommodate itself, or else. He, too, summoned the idea of a center, of a different sort. He feared a "vengeance based on the law that we recognize when we say, 'Whatever goes up must come down.' And here we are, at the center of the arc," perhaps ready to fall.<sup>44</sup>

Baldwin only failed to pinpoint the third world country of Vietnam, which would prove able to rock the stability of US hegemony. In the fall of 1963, US engagement in the Vietnam War deepened as Washington tacitly approved a coup by South Vietnamese generals, who murdered the former US favorite Ngo Dinh Diem—just three weeks before John Kennedy himself was shot. The sense of danger abroad in the Cold War world had barely lessened since its peak in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, and yet the fact that some chose to laugh rather than shiver in fear—Stanley Kubrick's new movie, *Dr. Strangelove*, would mock the *irrationality* of nuclear strategists such as Herman Kahn—signaled a significant shift in sensibility. The movie was completed at the end of 1963, but given the dark mood following Kennedy's assassination, its release was held over to 1964. While the passage of the Civil Rights Act that year was hailed by the political mainstream in a 1950s idiom of national consensus and comity, the next year or two only confirmed the new sensibility. Lyndon Johnson's escalation of the war in early 1965 was greeted by an outpouring of dissent, largely on college campuses, merging students and younger faculty active in "conflict resolution" and third world studies such as Anatol Rapoport, Marshall Sahlins, and Eric Wolf, who created the first antiwar "teach-in" at the University of Michigan.

Later that same year, news broke of a CIA-backed program intended to aid counterinsurgency abroad by funding social science research into the conditions fostering revolution and civil war in third world countries. Named Project Camelot, the program was vehemently denounced as US subversion by politicians in Chile, where a ham-handed agent of the CIA was seeking Camelot collaborators. The news aroused a firestorm too among US academics, some of whom defended the integrity of such research while others, for the first time in large numbers, assailed the effort as a dangerous attempt to suborn scholarship for aggressive political and military ends.<sup>45</sup> The intellectuals' disenchantment with US hegemony was something new, something that would grow in intensity by the end of the 1960s.

Such disenchantment was but one signal of a phase change, a subtle shift toward a new period, one showing new traits that would in time gain in visibility, and salience. The midcentury aspiration to center experience in rounded wholes—in national identity and belonging, in essentials of self, family, gender, and sex, in the foundations of disciplines and canons of cultural achievement, in “the free world” secured by US power—would give ground to a new revolt against formalism, sensitive to the decentered character of experience and history in ways that have not ceased since. Arguably, the United States has yet not lost its overweening, preeminent material power in world affairs, but a Copernican jolt has knocked American sensibilities out of their self-assured but illusory place “at the center” of civilization's orbit. The age of equipoise held only briefly at midcentury, and the steady background noise of anxiety has long since come into the forefront of everyday life. Fears of global violence, economic divisions and social conflicts, totalitarian ideologies, and ecological catastrophe that fueled the midcentury search for foundational principles have returned, albeit in new forms. But the confidence that such principles are available has not. Americans now live, indefinitely, on edge.





## Chronology

- 1947: Truman Doctrine commits United States to oppose communist advances. Truman administration announces federal loyalty oath program. George Kennan publishes “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” in *Foreign Affairs* under byline “X.” India and Pakistan gain independence from Britain. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* initiates the “Doomsday Clock,” which estimates the danger of nuclear war. Jackie Robinson joins Brooklyn Dodgers, breaking Major League color bar. Mont Pèlerin Society formed to promote “neoliberalism.” Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* wins the Pulitzer. Paul and Percival Goodman publish *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life*. Erich Fromm’s *Man for Himself* introduces psychoanalytical revisionism to a lay audience.
- 1948: Czechoslovak Communists launch coup. Mexican American veterans establish American GI Forum to secure equal benefits. Marshall Plan authorized. W. H. Auden’s *Age of Anxiety* wins the Pulitzer Prize. Norman Mailer publishes his debut novel about the Pacific War, *The Naked and the Dead*. Thomas Merton’s autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, traces his conversion from a modern, self-centered life to monastic devotion. Alfred Kinsey’s *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* challenges conventional wisdom. The RAND Corporation was established as a Defense Department contractor, specializing in “strategic studies.” Ruth Herschberger’s *Adam’s Rib* punctures misogynist myths. UN General Assembly approves Uni-



versal Declaration of Human Rights, drafted by a committee that Eleanor Roosevelt chaired. Julian Beck and Judith Malina launch the Living Theatre. Composer John Cage, dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham, and designer Buckminster Fuller attend Black Mountain College's summer art institute in Asheville, North Carolina.

- 1949: Arthur Schlesinger makes the case for anticommunist liberalism in *The Vital Center*. Jackson Pollock's *Number 1, 1948* is exhibited. NATO is established. USSR explodes its first atomic bomb. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* wins Pulitzer for drama; William Faulkner wins Nobel Prize. The Richard Rogers–Oscar Hammerstein antiracist musical *South Pacific* appears on Broadway; similar-themed films *Home of the Brave* and *Pinky* debut. Bollingen Prize to Ezra Pound sparks debate over literature and politics. Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* promotes conservation as “a state of harmony between men and land.” Eighth Street Artists Club formed in New York. Toshio Mori publishes *Yokohama, California*, the first collection of short stories by a Japanese American writer.
- 1950: Alger Hiss is sentenced for perjury. Joseph McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) accuses State Department personnel and academic experts of East Asia of communist loyalties. American studies pioneer F. O. Matthiessen commits suicide. Korean War begins. Anticommunist intellectuals convene the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Berlin. Gwendolyn Brooks becomes first African American author to win the Pulitzer Prize for her book of poetry, *Annie Allen*. Major works of American social science include Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society*; David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*; and Theodor Adorno et al.'s *The Authoritarian Personality*. Harry Hay founds the “homophile” organization, the Mattachine Society, in Los Angeles. Lionel Trilling's *Liberal Imagination* establishes him as a leading cultural critic and moralist. Black Mountain poet Charles Olson issues “Projective Verse,” a manifesto for a new poetry based on the “laws and possibilities of the breath.” Paul Goodman, Ralph Hefferline, and Fritz Perls publish *Gestalt Therapy*.
- 1951: The Korean War settles into stalemate near the Thirty-Eighth parallel. The “Ninth Street Show” in New York debuts works by Jackson Pollock, Joan Mitchell, Elaine and Willem de Kooning, Hans Hofmann, Lee Krasner, David Smith, and other abstract artists. J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* is published. Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* explores the “radical evil” represented by the Nazi and Stalinist

regimes. Japanese scholar D. T. Suzuki introduces Zen Buddhism to American audiences. Donald Webster Cory (Edward Sagarin) makes a case for gay self-assertion in *Homosexual in America*. Hans Namuth releases his film *Jackson Pollock* with a score by composer Morton Feldman. Bishop Fulton Sheen's surprisingly popular television program *Life Is Worth Living*, which features ostensibly nondenominational discussion of family, love, and life purpose, debuts.

- 1952: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is published. Hiss accuser Whittaker Chambers portrays a Manichean world struggle between Christian faith and communism in his memoir, *Witness*. McCarran-Walter Immigration Act ends ban on naturalization of nonwhite immigrants, retains national-origins quota system. John Cage and Merce Cunningham stage the multimedia *Theatre Piece No. 1* at Black Mountain. John Cage's *4'33''* is premiered by pianist David Tudor in Woodstock. Willem de Kooning's *Woman 1* is exhibited; Harold Rosenberg's essay "The American Action Painters" advances an antiformalist understanding of the abstract expressionists. Paul Tillich's *Courage to Be* expounds an existentialist Christianity. Fred Zinnemann's controversial Western, *High Noon*, is released.
- 1953: Arthur Miller's *Crucible*, a play about the 1692 Salem witch trials intended as an analogy to the Red Scare, premieres in New York City. Christine Jorgensen returns to New York after sex-reassignment surgery in Denmark. Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* is published in English. Stalin dies. Congress begins "termination" policy, ending federal recognition of Indian tribal governments and treaty obligations in selected cases. Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* is published. Merce Cunningham Dance Company is formed at Black Mountain. Anna Halprin choreographs her improvisational *People on a Slant*, in San Francisco. Russell Kirk publishes his "traditionalist" treatise, *The Conservative Mind*. The Armistice ends Korean War.
- 1954: Irving Howe and Lewis Coser start *Dissent* magazine as an organ of "democratic socialism." United States explodes its first effective hydrogen bomb. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board* decision rules school segregation unconstitutional. Billie Holiday, Lester Young, and Dizzy Gillespie headline first Newport Jazz Festival. Elvis Presley's version of Arthur Crudup's "That's All Right" is released by Sun Records in Memphis. William H. Sheldon's *Atlas of Men: A Guide of Somatotyping the Adult Male* identifies standard body shapes with personality types. Robert Rauschenberg begins his "combine" works of painting

and found objects. Jasper Johns creates his iconic *Flag* painting. Joseph McCarthy is censured by the Senate.

- 1955: Afro-Asia Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, marks debut of new states soon to be known as “the third world.” Fourteen-year old Emmett Till murdered in Money, Mississippi; buried after open-casket funeral attended by tens of thousands in Chicago. Allen Ginsberg gives first public reading of *Howl*. The arrest of activist Rosa Parks ignites the Montgomery bus boycott. William F. Buckley founds *National Review*. Photography exhibit *The Family of Man* opens at the Museum of Modern Art. Will Herberg’s *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* critically examines religious assimilation. Women’s “homophile” organization, Daughters of Bilitis, founded in San Francisco. Chuck Berry’s “Maybelline” and Little Richard’s “Tutti Frutti” help convert “rhythm and blues” into “rock ’n’ roll.” Dorothy Day and A. J. Muste participate in protest of civil defense drill in New York.
- 1956: Israel, Britain, and France attempt to retake the Suez Canal from Gamal Abdel Nasser’s Egyptian government. Soviet military suppresses revolt in Hungary. Montgomery bus boycott ends with elimination of segregation on the city’s buses. W. H. Whyte’s *Organization Man* popularizes critique of American conformity. Anarcho-pacifist magazine *Liberation* begins publishing. C. Wright Mills’s *The Power Elite* posits the concentrated coordinated power of elites in big business, government, and the military as the key feature of postwar US society. Elizabeth Bishop wins the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. Committee for Nuclear Information, led by biologist Barry Commoner, publicizes dangers stemming from nuclear fallout. James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* dramatizes a gay romance.
- 1957: Southern Christian Leadership Conference formed. Supreme Court’s *Roth* decision allows publication of much literary work previously deemed “obscene.” Committee for Non-Violent Action starts protesting the nuclear arms race through civil disobedience at nuclear testing sites. Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* gives the Beat writers more exposure. John Okada’s novel, *No-No Boy*, tells the story of a Japanese American resister to wartime internment. *West Side Story* premieres on Broadway. Soviet launch of *Sputnik* satellite stuns US policymakers. Psychologist Evelyn Hooker publishes her first work challenging the medical diagnosis of homosexuality as a sickness. Miles Davis’s album *Birth of the Cool* (with Gil Evans) released, initiating a series of innovations that took jazz beyond bebop. Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* illustrates her doctrine of “Objectivism.”

- 1958: Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* premieres on Broadway. Frank Lloyd Wright designed Guggenheim Museum and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe designed Seagram Building open in New York. Frank Sinatra's *Only the Lonely* manifests a kind of self-revelation in popular culture. John Birch Society founded. Fifth and final volume of William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* published. John K. Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* criticizes "private opulence and public squalor." Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* updates the nightmarish vision of *film noir*. Democratic victories in midterm congressional elections spur talk of a revival in liberalism. National Aeronautics and Space Administration established. Elvis Presley enters the US Army.
- 1959: Fidel Castro's Rebel Army successfully overthrows the US-backed Battista regime. Eleanor Flexner publishes first major history of the women's suffrage movement, *Century of Struggle*. A movie version of *The Diary of a Young Girl* popularizes the story of Dutch Jewish Anne Frank and builds attention to the Nazi destruction of European Jewry. National Defense Education Act passed, increasing federal funding for university training in foreign languages and area studies. Hazel Barnes's *Literature of Possibility: A Study in Humanistic Existentialism* gives scholarly imprimatur to contemporary continental European philosophy. Robert Frank's photographic tour of the United States, *The Americans*, published. Allan Kaprow stages *18 Happenings in Six Parts*.
- 1960: Lunch counter sit-ins begin, Greensboro; SCLC executive secretary Ella Baker facilitates the organization of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee at Shaw University, Raleigh. Daniel Bell publishes *The End of Ideology*. Walt W. Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth* appears as both a theory of modernization and an ideological précis of John Kennedy's foreign policy. Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* diagnoses the "problems of [male] youth in the organized society." Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960* records the rise of a new modernism in American literature. The conservative Young Americans for Freedom is founded.
- 1961: Cuba turns back Bay of Pigs invasion. Representatives of ninety tribes issue *Declaration of Indian Purpose*; younger activists led by Clyde Warrior and Mel Thom found the National Indian Youth Council. Herman Kahn's *On Nuclear War* manifests the work of the new strategic-policy intellectuals. Fifty thousand join Women Strike for Peace calling for a nuclear test ban. The culminating work of Lewis Mumford's career in urbanism, *The City in History*,

wins the National Book Award; Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* challenges midcentury urban planning. Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?* envisions a pluralism of competing interest groups. Judy Garland's "comeback" concert at Carnegie Hall is a coming-out party for her gay fans. *Art and Culture* collects Clement Greenberg's key essays on American modernist painting. Louis Chu's novel *Eat a Bowl of Tea* breaks with white stereotypes of life in New York's Chinatown.

- 1962: Milton Friedman publishes his free-market manifesto, *Capitalism and Freedom*. Michael Harrington's expose of poverty, *The Other America*, appears. Herbert Gans's *Urban Villagers* shows an Italian American working-class neighborhood in Boston resisting "urban renewal." Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* on the ecological dangers of pesticide is published. Thomas Kuhn invigorates debate about scientific progress in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Students for a Democratic Society drafts the Port Huron Statement promoting "participatory democracy." World experiences Cuban missile crisis. Bob Dylan records "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Robert Dunn, and others launch the Judson Dance Theater. "The New Realists" exhibition showcases Andy Warhol and other pop artists.
- 1963: Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* appears in *The New Yorker*. Betty Friedan publishes *The Feminine Mystique*. *The Bell Jar* is published under a pseudonym in Britain, a month before author Sylvia Plath commits suicide. SCLC mounts Birmingham, Alabama, campaign for citywide desegregation; Martin Luther King Jr. writes "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." Limited nuclear test ban treaty is signed. March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Yale psychologist Stanley Milgram publishes the first report of his alarming experiments regarding "obedience to authority." Ngo Dinh Diem is assassinated in South Vietnam coup. John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas. LeRoi Jones's *Blues People* marks a new interpretation of African American music in the United States. James Baldwin's *Fire Next Time* exemplifies new African American impatience with white resistance. Ethnographer and dancer Katherine Dunham choreographs the Metropolitan Opera's production of *Aida*.



# Notes

## Introduction

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22. Mickey Flacks and Dick Flacks, *Making History/Making Blintzes: How Two Red Diaper Babies Found Each Other and Discovered America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 24, 60–77.
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32. Ralph Ellison, "The Blues," *New York Review of Books*, February 6, 1964, 5–7.
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37. Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 124–27, 147–78.
38. Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 162.
39. Jones, *Blues People*, 112–13.
40. Jones, *Blues People*, 220, 224.
41. Jones, *Blues People*, 235–36.
42. Greil Marcus, *The Old, Weird America: The World of Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes* (New York: Picador, 2011).
43. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 15, 16, 93, 136, 141.
44. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 141.
45. Joy Rohde, *Armed with Expertise: The Militarization of American Social Research during the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 63–89.





## Bibliographic Essay

The immediate postwar years have undergone an explosion of studies. What follows barely skims the surface. Perhaps the best of many good general histories of the mid-twentieth century is James Patterson's *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). The best general social history of the period can be found in Lizabeth Cohen's *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003). Such books as John P. Diggins, *The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace, 1941–1960* (New York: Norton, 1988) and Marty Jezer, *The Dark Ages: Life in the United States, 1945–1960* (Boston: South End Press, 1982), indicate by their titles a view of the period as characterized either by social peace and consensus or its opposite, repression and underlying dissent. David Halberstam's popular history, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard Books, 1993), does likewise, arguing that that a surface prosperity and conformity covered a dissatisfaction that flowered in the "sixties." Apart from these, Wendy Wall's *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) smartly argues that while Americans agreed on the need for consensus, they divided over definitions of it.

Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985); Neil Jumonville's *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); and Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University

Press, 1996) are standard cultural and intellectual histories of midcentury. Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941–1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) makes a persuasive case that the middle third of the twentieth century shared a common cultural logic. George Marsden, *The Twilight of American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief* (New York: Basic Books, 2014) is a conservative religious analysis of the limitations of the major currents of postwar thought. Fred Kaplan's *1959: The Year Everything Changed* (Hoboken: J. Wiley & Sons, 2009) is both broader and subtler than the title suggests. Daniel Horowitz's memoir, *On the Cusp: The Yale College Class of 1960 and a World on the Verge of Change* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), identifies emerging themes of the time such as decolonization abroad.

Joshua Freeman's *American Empire: The Rise of a Global Power, the Democratic Revolution at Home, 1945–2000* (New York: Viking, 2012) covers the second half of the century with particular attention to the interplay of domestic and world politics. The export of midcentury American arts to the world at large is the subject of Jack Masey and Conway Lloyd Morgan's *Cold War Confrontations: US Exhibitions and Their Role in the Cultural Cold War* (Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller, 2008) and Penny M. Von Eschen's *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

In recent years, scholars have emphasized how the Cold War has affected intellectual and cultural life beyond the political sphere. In this vein are Paul Erickson et al., *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), which explores those who sought to define the nature of “rationality” as such in the context of “strategic” concerns of conflict between nuclear-armed states; George A. Reisch, *How the Cold War Transformed Philosophy of Science: To the Icy Slopes of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jessica Wang, *American Science in an Age of Anxiety: Scientists, Anticommunism, and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Jamie Cohen-Cole, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), which concentrates on the so-called cognitive revolution in psychology and linguistics. See also Mark Solovey and Hamilton Cravens, *Cold War Social Science: Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Joy Rohde, *Armed with Expertise: The Militarization of American Social Research during the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013). Joel T. Isaac, *Working Knowledge: Making the Human Sciences from Parsons to Kuhn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), treats ideas about the nature of scientific method with less emphasis on Cold War influences.

The impact of the Cold War on natural science and engineering is chronicled in Stuart W. Leslie, *The Cold War and American Science: The Military-Industrial-Academic Complex at MIT and Stanford* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Rebecca S. Lowen, *Creating the Cold War University: The Transformation of Stanford* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Paul N. Edwards, *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).

The importance of the concept of “totalitarianism” for midcentury thought is treated in Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), and David Ciepley, *Liberalism in the Shadow of Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). CIA influence on Cold War discourse is discussed in Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 1999), and Hugh Wilford’s judicious *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

The effect of the Red Scare on academic life is best handled in Ellen Schrecker’s *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). General accounts of the Red Scare include Schrecker’s *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998), and Landon Storr’s *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2008) turns attention to the impact on domestic life. The essays in Joanne Meyerowitz, editor, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994) dispute May’s portrait of a uniform Cold War–induced conservative domestic ideology.

Art and aesthetics have been extensively surveyed, especially the knotty problem of modernism. Robert Genter’s *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) helpfully reinterprets, as intellectual history, the various strains of modernism in this period. Studies of modernist art in the United States at midcentury include T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) and Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Jed Perl, editor, *Art in America 1945–1970: Writings from the Age of Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Minimalism* (New York: Library of America, 2014) is a useful collection of the art criticism of the period.

On Abstract Expressionism, see Dore Ashton, *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), which situates the rise of the movement in its broader intellectual and cultural contexts. Other contextualist accounts include Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) is a polemical history of the relationship between the movement and US Cold War policy; Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015) is a more discerning account that also treats literary figures. David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent during the McCarthy Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) explores the political radicalism of artists and intellectuals associated with the movement. Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) brings to the fore the women, artists of color, and gay and lesbian Abstract Expressionists often neglected in studies of the movement.

Several works describe the experimental scene at Black Mountain College: Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), based on extensive interviews with faculty and students; Eva Diaz, *The Experimenters: Chance and Design at Black Mountain College* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); and Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987). Avant-garde offshoots of Black Mountain are discussed in Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), and Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33''* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). On experimental theater and "Happenings," see Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means: An Introduction to Happenings, Kinetic Environments, and Other Mixed-Means Performances* (New York: Dial Press, 1968); John Tytell, *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile, and Outrage* (New York: Grove Press, 1995); Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay: The Art of Allan Kaprow* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Judith F. Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011).

The history of postwar modern architecture and planning parallels other midcentury trends, with German refugees helping to make the United States

a central site for the international movement. Useful surveys include William H. Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects: The Impact of European Modernism in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1976), and Gwendolyn Wright, *USA Modern Architectures in History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008). Sarah Goldhagen, *Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) locates Kahn's work in the architectural and urbanist discourses of his time. Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) is an important study of urban planning and its consequences in New York. The recoil against modernist planning often came from figures long associated with the movement, notably Jane Jacobs. See Peter L. Laurence, *Becoming Jane Jacobs* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). Jamin Creed Rowan, *The Sociable City: An American Intellectual Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017) traces the influence of ecological writing on Jacobs's work.

The importance of alienation and notions of the absurd to the period can be found in Bernard Murchland, *The Age of Alienation* (New York: Random House, 1971), and John F. Laffey, *Civilization and Its Discontented* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1993). Many popular treatments of the Beats regarded their alienation with reverence. The essays in Kostas Myrsiades, *The Beat Generation: Critical Essays* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002) take fuller measure. See, also, Jonah Raskin, *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Existentialism was not about alienation per se, but the philosophy did posit the self alone. Existentialism's American manifestations are expertly treated in George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

The strain of ideas regarding "modernization," shading off into the history of American foreign relations, has occupied the attention of several historians: Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2003); Michael E. Latham's two books, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), and *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). For general accounts of the formation of US foreign policy, see Michael H. Hunt, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007)



and Melvyn Leffler's definitive book, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

Among histories of particular academic disciplines, David Engerman's *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), stand out. A key concept in midcentury psychology receives attention in Lawrence J. Friedman, *Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson* (New York: Scribner, 1999), and the more broad-ranging work by Gerald Izenberg, *Identity: The Necessity of a Modern Idea* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: Self & Society in Modern America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) explores a central concern of social thought, the difficulties of grounded selfhood. The literature on Freud in America is extensive. Among books worth consulting are Nathan G. Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917–1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); John Burnham, editor, *After Freud Left: A Century of Psychoanalysis in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), especially the essays by Dorothy Ross, Louis Menand, and Jean-Christophe Agnew; and Eli Zaretsky, *Political Freud: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). For the importance of other schools of psychodynamics, see Merve Emre, *The Personality Brokers: The Strange History of Myers-Briggs and the Birth of Personality Testing* (New York: Doubleday, 2018) and Edward Hoffman, *The Right to Be Human: A Biography of Abraham Maslow* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1999).

On significant trends in sociology, see Daniel Geary, *Radical Ambition: C. Wright Mills, the Left, and American Social Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). On trends in anthropology, see John S. Gilkeson, *Anthropologists and the Rediscovery of America, 1886–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Peter Mandler, *Return from the Natives: How Margaret Mead Won the Second World War and Lost the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). Rebecca Lemov has written two fascinating, idiosyncratic accounts of midcentury work in the social sciences: *World as Laboratory: Experiments with Mice, Mazes, and Men* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), and *Database of Dreams: The Lost Quest to Catalog Humanity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

Economics was particularly vibrant. See Michael A. Bernstein, *A Perilous Progress: Economists and Public Purpose in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Angus Burgin, *The Great*

*Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets since the Depression* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012). Regarding the discipline of history in this period, see the relevant sections of Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); on survey research, Sarah Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

For religious history of the mid-twentieth century, consult Robert Wuthnow's *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) and Kevin Schulz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). The variety of American Protestantism can be found traced in David Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Richard Wightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); Andrew Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015). Axel R. Schäfer's *Countercultural Conservatives: American Evangelicalism from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011) traces the development of the National Association of Evangelicals in the period.

Catholicism was especially prominent in the postwar era, after years of prejudice and disdain from Protestants. See John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: Norton, 2004), and James Terence Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). The role of Jews in American life is covered in Andrew R. Heinze, *Jews and the American Soul: Human Nature in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). Accounts of growing interest in Buddhism (and other "Eastern" religions) can be found in Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Douglas Osto, *Altered States: Buddhism and Psychedelic Spirituality in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976) has long been the standard account of ideas on the right through the 1950s, but the field has expanded dramatically in the past twenty-five years. Aside from histories of conservative political

organizing, studies of conservative ideas include Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Steven M. Teles, *The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement: The Battle for Control of the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Shadia Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); and Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950–1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). Of course, the line between intellectual life and ideology is often hard to draw: such works as Kim Phillips-Fein's *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal* (New York: Norton, 2010) and Donald Critchlow's *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) cross that line adeptly.

Michael Kimmage's superb *The Conservative Turn: Lionel Trilling, Whitaker Chambers, and the Lessons of Anti-Communism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009) provides a penetrating portrait of the politics of literary life. Morris Dickstein's *Leopards in the Temple: The Transformation of American Fiction, 1945–1970* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002) provides a broad overview of what contemporaries regarded as the maturation of American literature. George Hutchinson, *Facing the Abyss: American Literature and Culture in the 1940s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018) explores the developing universalist discourse of the 1940s and in the process delves into matters that Dickstein slights. Mark Greif's *Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) mobilizes the “crisis” discourse of midcentury to examine works by Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, and Flannery O'Connor. Paula Rabinowitz's *American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014) offers a stimulating look at what the author calls “demotic” fiction.

Poetry has attracted a good deal of attention. Robert Von Hallberg's survey, *American Poetry and Culture, 1945–1980* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1985); David Lehman, *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets* (New York: Doubleday, 1998); Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Robert Casillo, *The Genealogy of Demons: Anti-Semitism, Fascism and the Myths of Ezra Pound* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988) are among the best.

The 1950s, led by Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and William Inge, have long been considered the Golden Age of Drama. Among the most perceptive are: C. W. E. Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945–2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); S. E. Wilmer, *Theatre, Society and*

*the Nation: Staging American Identities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Susan Harris Smith, *American Drama: The Bastard Art* (*Cambridge Studies in American Theatre and Drama*) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Winifred L. Frazer, *The Theme of Loneliness in Modern American Drama* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1979).

Literary criticism receives its due in Mark Jancovich, *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), and Joseph North, *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

Studies of African American literary production must include critical treatments of Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Lorraine Hansberry. For Ellison, see Jerry Gafio Watts, *Heroism and the Black Intellectual: Ralph Ellison, Politics, and Afro-American Intellectual Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) and Arnold Rampersad, *Ralph Ellison: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007). Baldwin is examined by Herb Boyd, *Baldwin's Harlem: A Biography of James Baldwin* (New York: Atria Books, 2008). Gwendolyn Brooks is the subject of Angela Jackson, *A Surprised Queenhood in the New Black Sun: The Life and Legacy of Gwendolyn Brooks* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017); Hansberry in Ben Keppel, *The Work of Democracy: Ralph Bunche, Kenneth B. Clark, Lorraine Hansberry, and the Cultural Politics of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), and Imani Perry, *Looking for Lorraine: The Radiant and Radical Life of Lorraine Hansberry* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).

More generally, see Ross Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) and Lawrence Patrick Jackson, *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). On the black literary Left, see Mary Helen Washington, *The Other Blacklist: The African American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). Jay Garcia's *Psychology Comes to Harlem: Rethinking the Race Question in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2012) features insightful studies of Wright, Ellison, Chester Himes, and James Baldwin as well as such white writers as Lillian Smith, who assailed white supremacy. Kevin Gaines's *African Americans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) covers an important internationalist current of black intellectuals.

Alan Wald's *American Night: The Literary Left in the Era of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012) completes a trilogy on

communist-affiliated writers. The general history of left-wing radical thought through the mid-twentieth century is much harder to trace, considering the prevailing Red Scare environment, but a key place to start is the “independent radicalism” of the late 1940s best captured by Gregory Sumner’s *Dwight Macdonald and the politics Circle: The Challenge of Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) and Leilah Danielson, *American Gandhi: A. J. Muste and the History of Radicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). Maurice Isserman’s *If I Had a Hammer . . . : The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, 1987) features the *Dissent* magazine circle of Democratic-Socialist intellectuals. Feminist dissent through the 1950s is traced by Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of “The Feminine Mystique”: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000). Much work remains to be done on feminist and women’s rights ideas through the 1950s, when they were widely (but mistakenly) assumed to be utterly dormant. Shira Tarrant examines women’s challenges to “scientific” pronouncements about their nature in *When Sex Became Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

For postwar adolescents, see Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Bard, 1999), and Don Miller, *Coming of Age in Popular Culture: Teenagers, Adolescence, and the Art of Growing Up* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood/ABC-CLIO, 2018).

Ideas of race and ethnicity at midcentury are covered in Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: Norton, 2010); Werner Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Thomas J. Archdeacon, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History* (New York: Free Press, 1983); and Richard H. King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals, 1940–1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

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of Texas Press, 1993). Ronald Takaki's general history *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998) remains useful for an overview of the years after World War II. The significance of "termination" policies and roots of the 1960s American Indian movement are discussed in Stephen Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) and Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: New Press, 1996).

Scholars have pointed out that sexuality and sexual identities at mid-century were far too contradictory and complex to be easily characterized. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012) is the standard work. For new meanings of sex, see Paul Robinson, *Modernization of Sex: Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey, William Masters, and Virginia Johnson* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) and Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). Studies of the leading student Alfred Kinsey are as vexed as his 1950s reputation. See Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *Kinsey: Sex the Measure of All Things* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004) and James H. Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

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All sorts of "countercultures"—before that term gained currency as it did in the late 1960s—germinated in the 1950s. Linda Sargent Wood surveys "holistic" visions tending toward mysticism in *A More Perfect Union: Holistic Worldview and the Transformation of American Culture after World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). A forerunner of the 1960s

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Focused studies of individual thinkers are legion. See Elisabeth Young-Bruhl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), for an admiring portrait. A much more critical view appears in Richard Wolin's *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). Richard H. King's careful, insightful book, *Arendt and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), emphasizes Arendt's approach to American society and politics and the debates that her works stirred during her lifetime. Regarding another European immigrant who assumed prominent roles in postwar American intellectual life, see Laurence J. Friedman, with Anke M. Schreiber, *The Lives of Erich Fromm: Love's Prophet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013). Walter A. Jackson's *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938–1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990) provides the definitive account of Myrdal's impact.







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