

5

The Liberal/Conservative Divide in the USA; The Past

Now that we have a firm grasp of the key issues that divide liberal from conservative opinion, as well as the global world views and mental frameworks that account for those opinions, it behooves us to consider how we got here, how these issues have evolved over time. I will do that in this chapter, and then pick up the thread in Chapters 8 and 12. More precisely, in this chapter I will trace the history of the liberal/conservative divide over the last century, then in Chapter 8, I will assess the status and relative strengths of the two camps today, and finally in Chapter 12, I will offer some predictions about those relative strengths over the next few decades. Moreover, in all three chapters I will purposefully adopt the vantage point of the present. Of course, as historians will point out, nineteenth century Americans would approach the issues of separation of church and state, role of the military and international relations very differently than we do. Nevertheless, I shall interpret the stances and attitudes of nineteenth century Americans on those issues in the context of how we understand them today.

I intend to focus my attention primarily on the last century for the following reason. At the risk of some oversimplification, I will argue that, viewed from today's vantage point with an early twenty first century mindset, there was a fairly broad political/cultural consensus in the land from the early 1700s until roughly 1900, which would be characterized in today's lexicon as conservative. The early settlers of America, right up to the American Revolution, took their political cues from John Locke, Edmund Burke and Adam Smith, unlike the French and Germans of that era, who were animated more by the radical philosophes of the French school like Jean-Jacques Rousseau. From the early part of the eighteenth century until the later part of the nineteenth—and again I emphasize, from the

vantage point of today—the overriding political philosophy of the United States of America was basically conservative. What is the evidence?

The founders were extraordinarily mindful of the harm that governments historically inflicted on their subjects. They were well-schooled in European history, as well as the history of the ancients. Therefore, they knew well that the unchecked powers of monarchies, oligarchies, military dictatorships and religiously-inspired sovereigns were prescriptions for loss of freedom, liberty and tranquility. But they were not idealists—they also knew that America could not consist of a series of bucolic villages, mercantile towns and seafaring ports, each pursuing prosperity while having little to do with one another. There had to be a central government, but it had to be designed wisely so as to avoid all the drawbacks associated with non-democratic forms of government. Actually, it took them two rounds to get it right—the failed Articles of Confederation preceded the successful Constitution. That said, I believe it is undeniable that our founding documents (the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Federalist Papers, and of course the Constitution) are a pragmatic, yet clearly and forcefully stated set of guidelines for a very conservative—by today’s standards—form of government.

The federal government was small, limited in scope and proscribed—explicitly and implicitly—from meddling in the affairs of individual citizens. Its powers of taxation were very limited, therefore it did not have a lot of money to spend, and of course it regulated little beside interstate commerce. Its primary roles were to keep the currency sound, see that the laws were enforced, and protect the nation from foreign adversaries—testified to eloquently by the existence of only four cabinet level departments in George Washington’s administration: Treasury, Justice, State and War. While today the activities of the federal government are sufficiently extensive and pervasive to fill the front page of any American newspaper, I venture the average American citizen in the 1700s and 1800s thought little about the federal government on a daily basis.

While the principle of separation of church and state was enshrined in the nation’s lore—and law—at its birth, it was nevertheless true that religion played a huge role in society. Every city, town and village in the country had many churches, and within the latter a church was usually the focal point of the village green. Church attendance was very high. Religious references appeared often in public documents—as they do in the founding documents. Church officials com-

manded great respect among the populace. And without a doubt, the morals, principles and practices of the various Christian denominations held great sway in the minds, mores and homes of the American people. The percentage of the population to which these sentences would apply today is debatable, but in eighteenth and nineteenth century America, it was overwhelming.

Having stated the case in some detail for two of the key components of the conservative milieu in pre-twentieth century America (i.e., role of government and role of religion), let us pass more quickly through several others. The vast oceans separating America from Europe and the Orient, combined with the slow pace of communication, allowed most Americans to be blissfully unaware of world affairs. In fact the Yankees of that time—although they admired many of the cultural achievements of European civilization—were definitely chauvinistic about what they viewed as their evidently superior political system compared to those of Europe. While not homogeneous like Sweden or Japan, the country was overwhelmingly White, Anglo-Saxon (meaning of British and, to a somewhat lesser extent, central European descent) and Protestant—thus WASP. (Of course, this ignores the substantial number of black slaves, but we'll deal with that elsewhere.) Issues like animal rights, gun control, abortion, the environment or diversity simply had no context or meaning to pre-twentieth century Americans. In 1800, America was an agrarian society, the economy was firmly in laissez-faire mode, local affairs dominated everyone's attention, and religion was public and pronounced. I don't mean to paint an idyllic picture, yet life was simple, generally without copious choices and there was a common ethic. People looked to family, neighborhood, church and especially to themselves, to solve their problems. While life generally did not match Hobbes' classic description, that is, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short," there were few safety nets and fewer creature comforts in comparison to the relative nirvana that we enjoy today. There was little time or inclination to ponder one's disadvantages, or to hatch schemes for others to fix them. There was even less opportunity to contemplate the general ills of society, nor any thought of asking the government to address them. Like I said, in the context of today, a very conservative society.

Well you might object that this description is apt for 1800, but much less so for 1900. Indeed, the United States went through major, convulsive transformations during the nineteenth century that resulted in enormous changes to the country: civil war and the abolition of slavery, industrialization, massive immigration, and the settling of the west and eventual closing of the frontier. Certainly

America looked very different at the end of the nineteenth century than it did at the beginning. Its population increased fifteen times, from roughly 5 million to 76 million souls. The land mass of the United States increased more than four-fold, from 865 thousand square miles to 3.5 million square miles (the latter includes a few territories that would eventually become states). The South's cotton-based economy was destroyed. Large numbers of freed slaves were not properly assimilated, but instead were segregated and confined to a poor rural life in the South and increasingly a poor urban life in the North. A rural America in 1800 was looking increasingly urban in 1900. Massive immigration from Western Europe in the early and mid part of the century yielded new citizens who were readily digested, but an even larger wave of immigration from Eastern Europe at the end of century produced more new Americans who—although they were largely assimilated—began to sow the seeds of great social, political and cultural change. The country remained overwhelmingly Christian, but it was no longer exclusively Protestant; there was now a substantial Catholic population. The number of Jews increased dramatically and although they constituted a small percentage of the population, they had a disproportionate effect in several critical areas, for example, business and the arts, and later in science, journalism, law and politics. The destiny of the country was no longer played out exclusively east of the Mississippi River. The vast scientific and technological advances of the nineteenth century created prosperity and opportunity. Those advances may seem primitive to us more than a century later, but railroads, electricity, telephone and telegraph, typewriters and adding machines, new methods of production (cotton gins, steam engines, coal-fired furnaces and sewing machines), and soon automobiles and airplanes, had a transforming effect on the everyday lives of American workers, consumers and producers. Instead of farmers and ranchers living and working in predominately rural areas, there were steadily more factory workers living and working in urban areas. And finally America was increasingly engaged in world affairs. This new engagement was highlighted at the *fin de siècle* by what many characterized as an aggressive role in the Spanish-American War.

These changes were reflected in some of the new issues that were coming on the table at century's end. These issues, which had no meaning or context a century earlier, included: the environment, the nature of the culture, the treatment of animals, and perhaps most importantly, "social justice" or the vast disparities in income and assets between the richest and poorest Americans. Some of the ideas of central and eastern European social and economic reformers were finding

their way across the Atlantic in the books and minds of the new immigrants. It was only a matter of time until some of those seeds would bear fruit.

But not quite yet. It is my contention that at the end of the nineteenth century, despite the enormous changes wrought by the convulsive events described above, the fundamentally conservative political/cultural philosophy of the eighteenth century still reigned. Why do I say that? For the following reasons:

- The government is still small. It is true that Chief Justice John Marshall radically expanded the power of the judicial branch of government—contrary to Hamilton’s assurances—when he created the concept of judicial review. And it is true that during the Civil War Abraham Lincoln accreted more power to the Federal Government than it had ever exercised in the country’s first 85 years. Nevertheless, at the end of the nineteenth century, the national government is still accurately described as limited. There is no income tax, no federal involvement in education, health care, pensions or housing, and no alphabet soup of federal agencies actively regulating countless aspects of American life.
- The focus is still local. The life and interests of most citizens are still dominated by local events, organizations and people. Americans don’t pay too much attention to what is going on in Washington, much less Paris or London.
- Religion is still important. Liberal Protestantism may no longer hold a monopoly on the people’s religious affiliations, but religiously affiliate they still do. America remains a church-going, God-fearing people who define their morals primarily in terms of the teachings of their spiritual leaders and their holy books.
- WASP culture is still intact. Even though no longer monolithic, the percentage of the citizenry that is WASP is still very high. Moreover, the newcomers who are not, and especially their children, buy into the WASP culture quite avidly. The Protestant work ethic, the Calvinist tradition of modesty, respect for private property, spirit of rugged individualism, ideal of the traditional family—these are alive and well.
- The country is still insulated from the European continent. The telegraph and faster ships improve communication with Europe, but America remains largely uninvolved in the affairs of the Great Powers of Europe. The influence of European culture on America is still mainly confined to the upper crust.

- The predominant landscape is still rural rather than urban. Although this was changing rapidly, the breakdown between rural and urban land mass is still 60-40 in 1900. (It was 94-6 in 1800 and 19-81 in 2000.)
- There is still no mass media. People get their news from books, periodicals and newspapers. Radio, movies with audio and television are still decades away.
- Life expectancy is improved, but the concept of retirement for other than the very wealthy does not really exist yet. People just don't live long enough. Those who do are cared for by their children.
- Technological advance has been stunning, but not enough to fundamentally alter the roles of men and women as they would be altered in the twentieth century. Earning a living and managing a family are just too time-consuming and labor intensive; therefore, the division of those labors with men and women in the traditional roles remains engraved in stone and unchallenged.
- And finally, there is still a sense of the founders. In that vein, I recall when I was young, in the middle of the twentieth century, reading stories about people—admittedly very old people—who were alive during the Civil War, or even about a woman who was only in her fifties but widowed from a much older man who fought in that conflict. It had the following effect on me when I studied the Civil War. I felt a sense of closeness to that epoch, not so unlike what I felt about World War II, during which I was born, or World War I, in which people from my grandfather's generation participated and spoke about. I had a completely different feeling when I studied the Revolutionary War—it might as well have been the Peloponnesian Wars. Well, in 1900 there were people alive who were also alive when Thomas Jefferson was alive. I imagine it created the same sense of pseudo-closeness to Revolutionary times that I felt to the Civil War era. Today of course both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War are just too long ago to be in anyone's personal frame of reference. But, speaking of the American Revolution, those in 1800 lived it, and those in 1900 could still relate to it in a personal way that we can no longer do today.

As I said, the core conservative political/cultural milieu of our forefathers was essentially intact at the end of the nineteenth century. But not for long.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the liberal ascendancy began. But certainly the conservative dominance that marked the political/cultural philosophy of the American people for two centuries began to crumble somewhere in the

neighborhood of the turn of the twentieth century. That dissolution was propelled by many events, ideas and movements. Let's list some key ones:

- The triumph of John Dewey's ideas about "free" public education, including how the government should mold pupils' beliefs;
- The growth of a powerful domestic labor movement;
- Increased environmental concerns, sparked by President Teddy Roosevelt;
- Wilsonian ideals of world peace and international cooperation;
- An infusion of socialist ideas that accompanied central and eastern European immigrants;
- The ratification in 1913 of the 16th amendment to the Constitution authorizing an income tax;
- The anti-trust movement;
- The suffragette movement;
- The advent of muckrakers who exposed excesses of American business;
- Adverse public reaction to the lives of robber barons and the extravagance of the Gilded Age;
- The Russian Revolution.

All of these events/developments occurred essentially during the first twenty years of the twentieth century—a period known to historians as the Progressive Era. I will now summarize what followed that era in a breathtaking recapitulation, by decades, of the seesaw nature of the liberal/conservative battle throughout the twentieth century. In fact, the last gasp of the conservatives occurred in the 1920s, the liberals took control in the 1930s, cemented their gains in the 1940s, enjoyed smooth sailing as their dominance was uncontested in the 1950s, then overreached in the 1960s, generating the beginnings of a backlash in the 1970s, that erupted into a full fledged counter-revolution in the 1980s, which, depending on your perspective, in the 1990s, achieved supremacy over, reached parity with, or still trails significantly behind the fifty-year liberal hegemony. Now let's flesh that out a little bit.

I will consider separately the nine periods: 1900-1920 and then each of the succeeding eight decades. The key events of course don't always fit neatly into

separate decades, but it will be a handy device for outlining the progression of the liberal/conservative struggle during the century just concluded. For each period, I will do three things. First, I will supply a short bulleted list of the major events, ideas and movements that shaped the struggle in that period. Second, I elaborate on some of the bullets in a more discursive description of the crucial moments and distinguishing features of the decade that determined which way the liberal/conservative vectors were aligning. Third, I will highlight some of the touchstone issues that played key roles—those that came on the table and those that changed their position on the table. My treatment of the last period, the 1990s, will be a little skimpy, as I don't want to steal any thunder from Chapter 8. That is, I prefer to leave any assessment of recent events to the point when I am outlining where the liberal/conservative divide stands today. Anyway, when you reach the end of the discussion of the nine periods, you will have experienced, in about 20 pages, my quick political tour of the twentieth century. I confess that it reads a little like a description of an exciting, see-saw nine inning baseball game, so I hope you will enjoy the "reporting."

1900-1920. The Progressive Era

The bulleted list for the Progressive Era is found above. Viewed in the context in which I have described conservative America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the changes of the Progressive Era were actually rather radical. Government power expanded markedly, the market became less free, collectivist ideas gained currency and were implemented, notions of group rights were ascendant and a laboratory model for testing these ideas more concretely and vigorously was born in Soviet Russia. The alterations in society wrought by these changes were dramatic, although in truth not nearly as substantial as those that occurred in the century's other two major liberal outbursts—namely, during the 1930s and 1960s. Furthermore, the changes came along a very broad front as indicated by the variety of areas touched upon in the bulleted list. One remarkable feature of this story is that much of the impetus for the progressive program came from a Republican—Teddy Roosevelt. But I think more of the impetus derived from the real and perceived excesses of the business community as the full flower of the Industrial Revolution took hold. It would have been difficult to ignore the great fortunes amassed—and flaunted, the poor working conditions under which many laborers suffered, the industrial pollution, the denial of voting rights to women, and the exploitation of immigrants. There is no question that these and other abuses occurred. Guided by the statist philosophy sweeping Europe, America also looked to the government to solve these problems—as it would increas-

ingly throughout the century, and still does today. The great unanswered question is: what if we hadn't done that? Would the market have corrected the abuses on its own? Would the drive for profits unearthed more effective entrepreneurs who would have built better, cleaner, cheaper widgets, under more palatable working conditions, thereby eventually curing the ills I described? We'll never know. We cannot run a controlled experiment on an alternate time line as they do in *Star Trek*. Adherents can argue forcefully from both sides. Yes, the market would have corrected the abuses and spared us the soft government tyranny that burdens us today. No, the market failed us and we were headed for industrial tyranny; only the benevolent intervention of government saved us from that horrible fate.

During the Progressive Era our schmorgasbord of touchstone issues underwent the following changes. Of course government regulations and government taxes became major issues, with the more liberal stance in favor of increasing each gaining acceptance. International affairs also became more prominent as America, starting in the Spanish-American War and proceeding to World War I, began to play a major role in world affairs. For example, although the US never joined, it played a crucial role in setting up the failed League of Nations. Not only did America increasingly intervene in world affairs with the goal of affecting the behavior of other nations, but also Americans, especially new Americans, were more receptive to the idea that political and economic structures deployed by European governments might provide models worth emulating. This increased internationalism was advocated primarily by those on the Left. The Right tended toward isolationism and insularity from world engagement—quite the opposite of today's relative positions. We'll discuss this more fully later. Continuing with the changes in the issues schmorgasbord, liberal thought on many social issues was also gaining the upper hand. One consequence of mass immigration and the industrial revolution was an increase in crime. But now the country responded with more emphasis on rehabilitation and less on punishment. Environmental concerns jumped onto the radar screen in a big way. People became conscious of pollution and they wanted the government to fix it. One response: national parks were carved out of huge government land holdings. Next, the culture was called into question for the first time. America was no longer exclusively WASP—why should the WASP culture be paramount? Irish and Italian Catholics sought a place at the table. One of their number, Al Smith, even secured the Democratic nomination for President, although he did not win. Finally, the greatest issue change was the arrival of social justice on the agenda. The inequalities in wealth

among the populace are stark and the people start to expect the government to do something about it.

1920-1930. The Roaring Twenties and a ‘Return to Normalcy’

The phrases I would use to highlight this decade are:

- The roaring twenties;
- A “return to normalcy”;
- Protectionist fever;
- The “business of America is business”;
- The end of mass immigration;
- Media superheroes.

The decade of the 1920s, commonly called the Roaring Twenties, represented on the one hand a strong reaction to the Progressive Era and on the other—although it was not evident at the time—the last gasp of the classic American conservative age. Sentiment in the country moved against big government and in favor of big business. The end of the Great War (as World War I was known then), reductions in taxes, the increasingly favorable business climate in the States—especially in comparison to the devastated economies of Europe, and a growing confidence in the destiny of America, all these led to a resurgence of the private market and an economic roar of the kind that had not been seen in the United States for some time. The times were summed up in the chief campaign slogan of Warren Harding, elected President in 1920, calling America to a “return to normalcy.” A similar clarion call by his successor, Calvin Coolidge, namely “the business of America is business” also captured the spirit of the period. The decade also saw the emergence of what we would today call *media superheroes*. America never lacked for superheroes (George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson at the outset, Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln at mid 19th century, and later Thomas Edison, Mark Twain and Teddy Roosevelt), but in the 1920s, the advent of the mass media (large circulation newspapers, radio and talking movies) elevated the concept to that of media superhero—a concept that has only grown with the passing decades. The two that stand out for me are Babe Ruth and Charles Lindberg. Both captured the imagination of the public in a way that former heroes, in an age of much more limited media, were not able. I think this phenomenon was representative of the boom times, the roaring twenties. Indeed, the number of cars that Henry Ford

put outside American homes was staggering; America exhibited a newfound confidence on the world stage; and fortunes were made on Wall Street.

But there was a dark side to the story. Harding's was one of the most corrupt administrations in the nation's history. The fever of protectionism swept the land as both business and labor—for different reasons—mistakenly advocated high tariffs. America's international confidence unfortunately manifested itself in a trend toward extreme insularity and isolationism (that would grow more intense in the next decade). This was highlighted by America's refusal to participate in the League of Nations—despite the fact that it was Woodrow Wilson's idea. And the country, when bringing mass immigration to a close, did not adopt a measured policy, but instead slammed the door shut. Finally, the folly of prohibition resulted in crime, contempt for government edicts, and a cynicism that would soon be reinforced by the events of the next decade.

During the roaring twenties, the changes in the touchstone issues were few in comparison to what transpired in the Progressive Era. People put a brake on the rapid pace of change experienced in the first two decades of the century. The chief observation is that the needle on the international meter continued to read high as free trade was impeded by high tariffs, mass immigration was halted by the severely restrictive new immigration laws passed at mid-decade, and fitful attempts to create an international legal system proved futile. What of this was conservative and what liberal is hard to pinpoint here as the liberals were becoming increasingly internationalist, while the conservatives were moving in the opposite direction. We'll explore that development in greater depth later. Two other issues did register to some extent: (i) the culture, as the backlash to massive immigration was reflective of WASPs trying to reassert control; and (ii) religion, highlighted by Smith's candidacy, although it is still the case that the conservative hold on the religious constituency in the nation remains intact.

1930-1940. The Depression and the New Deal

Here's the list of the main events and movements:

- The Great Depression;
- Fascism in Europe;
- The rising sun in the Orient;
- The New Deal;

- Nazi aggression;
- The triumph of liberalism.

Of course the decade began in some sense a couple months early when the Stock Market crashed on October 29, 1929. That event, traditionally viewed as the beginning of the Great Depression, is one of the signature calamities of the American experience. The economic and social difficulties that followed cast doubt on the viability of our nation. It caused millions of Americans to decide that the country needed to be structured and governed differently from how it traditionally had, and thereby heralded the triumphant ascendancy of a liberal philosophy. Franklin Roosevelt and the liberal democrats who accompanied him to Washington seized the opportunity to expand the power, influence and reach of the federal government on society in a fashion completely unknown in the preceding century and one half of US history. Income taxes were increased and the idea of withholding it from paychecks was conceived.¹ Social Security and its attendant payroll tax were enacted. A slew of new government agencies were created to regulate American agriculture, transportation, energy and the environment. And even though these intrusions would pale in comparison with government interventions in these and other areas 30 years later, they were still monumental in comparison with past practice. As usual, there are two schools of thought. The New Deal was at best “socialism light” and its collectivist policies were and remain an albatross that restricts freedom and limits economic growth. The New Deal saved America from a fascist destiny, which was the fate that Germany—suffering from similar economic conditions—endured, and which, without the New Deal, we might very likely have replicated. You take your pick!

Having invoked Nazi Germany, I will mention the self-evident fact that fascism is the other great story of the 1930s. In Germany, in Italy and in Japan, fascist regimes took control and initiated policies that would lead in the next decade to the greatest conflagration in the history of the world. Why did these racist, aggressive and intolerant regimes come to power? There is no quick and easy answer, but here are two that match the spirit of my presentation. They arose because the unscrupulous business class, unconstrained by moral concerns for the people’s welfare, sought to control the means of production and concentrate power in a limited number of hands. Au contraire, each regime was a grotesque manifestation of collectivist government in which socialist ideas of government

1. but not implemented until 1943.

control of means of production and ownership of all property were carried to their logical extremes—namely, tyranny, which, as predicted by Hayek, is the inevitable outcome of collectivism. Your choice again!

In America, evolution in attitudes on the touchstone issues picked up speed. Being a decade of great upheaval, the evolution actually was more like a revolution as the pendulum swung sharply to the Left. The biggest change of course was in the area of social justice as the Roosevelt administration's big government solutions to the economic calamity found favor in the eyes of large portions of the population. Opinion swung in favor of drastically increased government spending, regulations and taxes, also in favor of wage and welfare laws, and against military spending. The liberal position was also gaining popularity in other areas, like a living Constitution, high tariffs, environmental activism and in the broadening of the cultural base. At the risk of beating the same drum, I would remark that, drastic as these changes in attitude were, opinion would move even more sharply to the Left in the 60s and 70s.

1940-1950. World War II

The main events are easy to recognize:

- War in Europe and the Pacific;
- Atomic weapons;
- The division of Europe at Yalta;
- The emergence of communism as a world force: start of World War III;
- A new attempt at world government—the UN;
- Economic reconstruction: the Marshall Plan;
- Occupation: converting Germany and Japan into democracies;
- The end of colonialism and dismantling of empires.

Once again the decade began months earlier, this time when Germany touched off the Second World War by invading Poland on September 1, 1939. The calamity that befell Europe, and the world for that matter, is without parallel in the annals of history. Tens of millions brutally slaughtered, the heavy boot of Nazi occupation across much of the continent for more than 5 years, disruption in the lives and economies of virtually all countries around the globe, and of course the destruction of European Jewry through the purposeful, methodically

planned and systematic murder of six million people. That America rose up to defeat the German and Japanese racist, fascist regimes is one of the great rescue stories of history. Had fascism triumphed, it is horrific to imagine the fate of the world and its peoples. It is important to remember that America's struggle was not associated with the Left or the Right. Aside from some crazies on the extreme Right, who doubted the evil of the Nazi regime, and some equally loony Leftists, who only cared about the health of the Soviet Union, the country was remarkably united in the fight. The victory was not complete, however, in that an equally totalitarian and evil Soviet empire emerged victorious, and thereby ensued four and one half decades of continued conflict—to be touched upon in the description of later decades in this recitation. Another caveat is that the nuclear genie escaped from the bottle. But the foreign policy unity in America continued with the Marshall Plan, the rebuilding of Europe, the establishment of the United Nations, a sustained and eventually successful effort to convert our defeated foes into liberal democracies, and finally our support and encouragement of the divestment of their colonial possessions by our European allies.

The foreign policy consensus was, in a perverse way, replicated in domestic affairs. For while the international affairs consensus was one among equals, that of domestic affairs reflected the fact that one side had thoroughly trounced the other. Indeed, the radical growth of government instituted in the 1930s was solidified in the 1940s—first because it seemed necessary to prosecute the war, and second because the conservative forces in America offered only the most token opposition. The country coasted toward mid century (1950) with gargantuan income tax rates, the regulatory agencies purring along on overdrive, and a consensus throughout the land that this was for the best—a well-regulated business community with massive government programs was the way to ensure continued prosperity and no return to the economic disaster of the Depression.

It was a remarkably quiet decade regarding changes in the issues—very little in the way of evolution was going on. There were these consensus after all. The upheavals of the 1930s were consolidated and institutionalized. No substantial change in attitudes on the touchstone issues was occurring. But it would be less so in the following decades as the pendulum would lurch again, further to the Left.

1950-1960. The Liberal Hegemony

The major events:

- The Korean War—a surrogate battle of WWII;
- Nuclear arsenals;
- Suburbanization of America;
- Ike—normalcy means something different from 30 years earlier;
- Desegregation and the civil rights movement;
- The Warren Court.

The 1950s are almost always misrepresented in schools and the media as a decade of conservatism and calm. This is false in both respects. First, the conservative America of 1800 or 1900 was by 1950 dead and buried. The key point is that the Republican administration of Dwight Eisenhower made no effort whatsoever to roll back or undo the New Deal. It could not if it wanted to, which it did not. Liberal political philosophy reigned unchallenged in the land. To cite just three examples: federal marginal income tax rates topped 90%; the Warren Court rode roughshod over the other branches of government; and the massive federal bureaucracy created to fight the Depression and prosecute the War against Fascism was not trimmed, but instead continued its steady growth. People may have felt after the world-wide conflict of the preceding period that things were back to normal—but that “normal” was the welfare state created by the changes of the Progressive Era and the New Deal, not the normalcy of the roaring twenties and certainly not 1880s normalcy. More importantly, the liberal consensus is so firmly entrenched and unquestioned that people do not realize it. The New York Times can blithely castigate the reactionary alliance of big business and conservative southern politicians who supposedly control America, whereas in fact every time the Times identifies a new national crisis, the people support its clamor for new government programs and agencies designed to deal with the urgent situation.

The second assertion, that of “calm,” is also without merit. A little perspective is in order. America enjoyed 30 years of peace between the end of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, then another 45 peaceful years between that conflict and the Civil War (the Mexican-American War does not count as a truly major conflagration), and another 50 years of peace between the end of the Civil War and the start of World War I (the Spanish-American War also does not count), and then a 20 years interval until World War II erupted. The point is that World War III began immediately as WWII ended (perhaps even earlier).

Incidentally, this wretched phenomenon has been repeated as WWIV commenced as WWIII concluded—and again, perhaps even before. During the decade of the 1950s we saw the drive to build nuclear arsenals, the battle for the allegiance of non-aligned countries and of course the Korean War (which was, like the Vietnam War, a great battle in WWIII). One could argue that the Marshall Plan and the rebuilding of Europe were also battles in WWIII and that, although they commenced in the 40s, they are properly associated with the postwar 50s era. America was not enjoying a postwar calm in the 1950s; it was in fact, despite its wishes, gearing up to fight WWIII. The fact that the war was more “cold” than “hot” masked its intensity, and often even camouflaged the fact that we were at war at all. (Of course we can be grateful that we never had to meet Soviet troops on the battle field and no nuclear exchanges occurred.) But it is important to reiterate that, like domestic policy, there was a consensus on foreign policy. The former was overwhelmingly liberal, but the latter could still qualify as conservative as the nation was fairly united in identifying the ultra Leftist Soviet Union as an enemy of American freedom that had to be combated. That unity would come unhinged in the next decade.

One could argue that it was in the 1950s that America became the nation that we know today: vast military strength, prosperous, technologically advanced, suburbanized, motorized, materialistic, truly pluralistic, and confident that the moderate welfare state it had established would ensure continued prosperity. All of these attributes remain valid a half-century later except the last. The consensus on the welfare state has been challenged and shaken from both sides: in the immediately ensuing decades in the furious assault by the Left to enhance collectivism, followed by the Right’s counter-revolution to limit government scope.

Befitting the two consensus I’ve described, the needle on the issues meter stayed relatively calm throughout the decade—with one enormous exception. The country attempted to come to grips with, and reach a benevolent resolution of, the most egregious stain on its record—slavery and its successor, segregation. The shame of slavery had ended formally nine decades earlier. Now the country confronted segregation—the dreadful system that succeeded slavery, less evil perhaps, but still woefully immoral. Speaking as a conservative here, I would acknowledge that this is an arena in which “privatization” was less than a booming success and that government intervention seems to have been required in order to resolve the problem. The achievements of the Civil Rights movement—a moral and political coalition of clergymen, politicians and social lead-

ers—were stupendous. Arguing and cajoling with great moral clarity, the movement—with Martin Luther King in the lead—effected a great change in the attitude of the majority of Americans, and the system of *legal* discrimination was finally laid to rest in a process that was completed in the next decade.

1960-1970. Woodstock

The major events:

- The assassination of JFK;
- Annihilation of Goldwater;
- Vietnam War;
- The Great Society;
- Woodstock;
- Urban riots;
- A trip to the moon.

The decade of the 1960s, unlike its two predecessors, “began late.” The election of John Kennedy in 1960 seemed, at the time, to herald great change. But in fact, in the grand scheme of the liberal/conservative divide, it changed little. His death in 1963, on the other hand, was a catalyst for major changes. It was the spark that triggered events, which in some ways we are still trying to cope with four decades later. The Johnson administration that came to power after Kennedy’s assassination proved to be the conveyor of the third great leap to the Left—following the Progressive Era and the New Deal. It brought us the Great Society. We saw an even more extensive intervention by the federal government into the affairs of the American people—in areas that had escaped its attention heretofore (health care, housing, the arts, and more).

The Left interpreted the rout of Barry Goldwater in 1964 as a total repudiation of conservatism by the people of the US, and it felt free to steer the ship of state sharply to port into uncharted waters of collectivism. For example, the administration declared War on Poverty—a “war” we are subsequently winning, but primarily by decommissioning the “weapons” deployed by the Great Society, which worsened the problems in many areas and created numerous new ones in others. Monetary policy was pursued that drove inflation and interest rates sky high—in line with liberal policy that such practices will, so they believe, increase

government revenues. As already mentioned, the legal civil rights battle was brought to a successful conclusion, but policies, principles, programs and practices were put in place that several decades later would result in the perversion of Dr. King's expressed goals, and in many ways prolong the suffering of a significant portion of those formerly deprived of their civil rights.

In foreign affairs, the Johnson administration would emit the last gasp of aggressive liberal internationalism. It attempted to prosecute the surrogate World War III battle in Vietnam by pretending the struggle was less serious than the great leap to the Left that it was pursuing domestically. In the end, neither effort succeeded. We fought in Vietnam with one hand tied behind our back, and we got our fannies kicked.² The liberal response to their own debacle in Vietnam was basically, "I'm never doing that again," an oath they have adhered to faithfully ever since.

But the domestic Great Leap Forward continued unabated. The assault was not only political and economic, it was also, and perhaps more importantly, cultural. The liberals emptied the prisons and the mental hospitals, paid poor women to boot out their husbands and have babies with multiple partners, built urban ghettos replete with Soviet style housing and gave the residents free reign to trash them, coarsened the culture by removing all moral checks on what could be depicted in the media, celebrated depravity in orgies like Woodstock, and excused—perhaps even encouraged—urban riots as a legitimate means to express displeasure with society's injustices—or, as in the case of Mayor Lindsay, paid protection money to social extortionists to forestall the riots that were threatened if said payments were not forthcoming. Near chaos reigned. Was America viable? Where would the turmoil end? The Soviets watched, took note and struck out on the offensive in the next decade.

Two events occurred at the end of the decade to suggest that perhaps the liberal dominance was not quite so total. But, as we shall see, these were false signals. The first was the election of Richard Nixon as President in 1968. Many interpreted this as a sign of fatigue among the people from the convulsions spawned by the liberal (mis)governance of society. But in fact Nixon's election represented

2. Or so it is perceived. In truth we fought the Communists to a draw and left South Vietnam in a position to defend itself—until we cut off their aid and stopped delivering weapons.

no more of a turn around than Eisenhower's did sixteen years earlier. The liberals hated Nixon—they still do. But a close examination of his record reveals little that is conservative, and no attempt at a rollback of the Great Society. For heaven's sake, Nixon instituted wage and price controls! He also dramatically expanded the number and power of federal regulatory agencies. In fact, Nixon represented no threat to the liberal hegemony—people just didn't want to go quite as far left as the Democratic Party sought to lead it.

The second "false" sign was the moon landing in the summer of 1969. The fulfillment of President Kennedy's dare, stated at the outset of the decade, was unquestionably a great achievement for America, and showed that working together with dedication and perseverance, the nation could still aspire to and accomplish monumental feats. Such a feat ran counter to the increasingly bleak picture that the liberals were painting of American society—one characterized by racism, nationalism, colonialism, and economic injustice. How could a society afflicted with those defects achieve something so spectacular and noble? Well, their answer was that the achievement was in fact a great accomplishment of the federal government, not corporate America, and so space exploration was institutionalized as the sole province of the federal government. Like all the other federal government programs of the 1960s, today it is evident that NASA is no more accomplished than any other inept, mismanaged and often misguided federal department or agency. So if the second sign was not false, it was at least misleading.

The continued liberal dominance is reflected in the country's attitudes on the issues. The needle screeches unceasingly to the left. The liberal stance is victorious on government spending, government regulations, welfare, wage laws, judicial activism, social justice, criminal rights and almost every other barometer in the touchstone issues. Although the NY Times is still railing against the conservative forces that are blocking progress, it is in fact true that the liberal position on the key issues is accepted wisdom, the liberals control all branches of government, and they are increasingly dominant in the media, university, legal profession, foundations and virtually every other elite corner of American life.

Will the new liberal philosophy reign for 200 years the way the conservative philosophy did? It has a firm grip. But the grip will become a vise, and a serious backlash would ensue.

1970-1980. Stagflation

The major events:

- More Vietnam;
- Nixon and Watergate;
- Roe vs. Wade;
- Soviets on the march;
- Malaise in America;
- Fall of the Shah and rise of the Ayatollah;
- Emergence of Pope John Paul II, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.

In the history of our beloved republic, the 1970s will not be remembered as one of its more glorious decades. The Vietnam War dragged on through half the decade, ending only after we negotiated a strategic retreat and then cut our South Vietnamese allies off at the knees. In the record books it went down as our first defeat in war, although (as previously mentioned) it should be more accurately described as a draw. The final defeat was suffered by the ally we betrayed; if we insist on categorizing it as a defeat for the US, then it should be remembered that we were not defeated militarily on the battlefield, rather our defeat was political in the court of domestic public opinion. Incredibly, the loss was compounded by our disgraceful treatment of the war's veterans.

Aside from the Vietnam battle, the overall Cold War was not going well. The Soviets and their surrogates were on the march in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Our European allies were increasingly nervous about our ability to protect them and were reverting more and more toward their natural inclination—appeasement. The Soviets spent wildly on conventional and nuclear weapons, despite—as we now know—the fact that little was left for domestic needs. They spawned vicious little clones of themselves all around the globe; probed our weaknesses at every opportunity; violated every arms agreement we made with them; tried to cajole us into unilateral disarmament (a course of action that many “peace-loving” liberals endorsed); kept a heavy boot on the enslaved countries of eastern Europe; and at the end of the decade brazenly invaded a neighboring country.

The difficulty of our international position and our military weakness were reflected in a declining ability to control world events. This was highlighted by the gasoline embargo imposed upon us in 1973-74 by various oil-producing countries—a group that included many so-called friends. Some of those friends are still our friends and behave as duplicitously and treacherously toward us as they did 30 years ago. That a bunch of two-bit countries could inflict economic hardship and political embarrassment upon us revealed how weak our position had become in the international arena. We had lost the will to punish our enemies and discipline our friends. I believe these calamities were a natural consequence of virtually unopposed liberal policies that were increasingly marked by isolationism, pacifism, third world worship and an inclination toward unilateral disarmament. But matters would get worse.

Indeed, following the caretaker government of Gerald Ford, the dominant liberal milieu coughed up the naïve, inexperienced and manifestly inept Jimmy Carter—unquestionably the most incompetent president of the 20th century. His failures were both domestic and international. His economic policies literally drove the economy into the ground: high unemployment, astronomical interest rates, explosive inflation, and stagnant economic growth. The pejorative coined to describe his accomplishments was “stagflation.” By the end of the decade, the economic mess was so bad that articles were written predicting that Japan, Western Europe and even the Soviet Union would surpass the US economically. Carter was equally adept at foreign affairs. The strongest move he ever made against the Soviets was to deprive hard working American athletes of the chance to compete in the 1980 Moscow Olympics. In retrospect, the gravest mistake he made was to apply his misguided notions of international justice to Iran. He aided the overthrow of the Shah and opened the door to the mullah thugocracy that still governs there and spreads its poison throughout the world. So in summary, while Carter was guiding us to defeat in World War III, he was simultaneously wrecking the economy and helping to launch the careers of the barbarians who would eventually initiate World War IV. Carter’s horrendous presidency was summed up poignantly by two events at the end of the decade: his pathetic speech in July 1979 that blamed the “malaise”³ of the American people for the dour state of affairs, and the utter humiliation of the hostage crisis in Tehran.

3. The word is never invoked in the speech, but the intention is clear and the appellation was immediately affixed.

Like I said, not our finest decade. But I cannot leave it without mentioning two more points. The first concerns the Supreme Court. In our country's first century and one-half, the Supreme Court largely lived up to Hamilton's prediction that it would be the least powerful of the three branches of government. Certainly the Court, led by Chief Justice John Marshall, invented its own power of judicial review in *Marbury vs. Madison* (1803). But, with the exception of several monumental—and for the most part, wrong-headed—decisions like *Dred Scott vs. Sanford* (1857) and *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896), the Court mostly fulfilled its role of judicial referee assigned to it by our founders. This began to change drastically in mid twentieth century with *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), *Engel vs. Vitale* (1962), *Griswold vs. Connecticut* (1965) and *Miranda vs. Arizona* (1966). In the reigning liberal hegemony, what could not be legislated in legislatures was legislated in the courts. Some would say this movement reached its zenith in 1973 in *Roe vs. Wade*, the ruling that mandated legal abortion nationwide.⁴ Surely this has proved to be one of the most contentious rulings ever issued by the Supreme Court. More than 30 years later the country remains badly divided about its legitimacy and no consensus is in sight. Whether one believes that *Roe vs. Wade* was a blow for human freedom in that it legitimized a women's control over her own body or that it was a huge step toward a culture of death, there are several points that are incontrovertible:

- At the time, many States had already legalized abortion and it was clearly going to be legal in the vast majority of the country's jurisdictions rather soon; there was no compelling need for the federal intrusion on the prerogatives of State legislatures.
- In fact, this was a classic case of "legislating from the bench." The Supreme Court rendered legal abortion the law of the land.
- Moreover, there were absolutely no grounds for its decision to be found in the US Constitution. The justices invented a right to privacy that is neither present nor implied in the Constitution, but according to the eminent justices, was hiding in the penumbra of certain clauses⁵. The justices wanted a certain outcome, so they made up the justification. Even many proponents of legalized abortion admit that *Roe vs. Wade* (and *Griswold vs. Connecticut* for that matter) was very bad Constitutional law. The

4. But maybe not; others would cite *Regents of the University of California vs. Bakke* (1978), *Bush vs. Gore* (2000), or even *New London, Conn. vs. Kelo* (2005) as equally controversial "power grabs."

Constitution was never more *alive* than in these two cases. Since Roe, the Court has not hesitated in its pursuit of *judicial activism*—by which I mean discovering new rights in the Constitution, legislating from the bench, and exceeding its Constitutional authority, *not* overturning or reversing rulings that liberals happen to favor and/or are constitutionally not viable.

The second point I want to make is that despite the setbacks of the 1970s, there was a silver lining to the cloudy forecast. In fact, there were three silver linings that appeared toward the decade's end, and they were Karol Wojtyła, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Of course, it would not be until the 1980s that these three great heroes of freedom would roll back the tide.

Regarding attitudes on the issues, the needle continues to drift Left. Little would change regarding pro-liberal positions on government spending and taxation, military affairs, social justice and the living Constitution. The biggest changes are in the cultural issues wherein abortion is legalized, homosexuality is increasingly accepted as a lifestyle choice (whether voluntary or not) instead of an aberration, criminal rights are expanded, environmental and animal rights activism is encouraged (the first Earth Day was in 1970), and religion is progressively banished from the public square. A virtual clean sweep for the liberal agenda. But the counter-revolution is poised to begin.

1980-1990. Ronald Reagan

The major events:

- Ronald Reagan;
- Defeat of communism and fall of the Soviet Union;
- Emergence of Islamic fundamentalism;
- Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas;
- Tiananmen Square;
- An Economic Boom.

5. More precisely, according to Justice Douglas in *Griswold vs. Connecticut* (1965), the right arises because "specific guarantees in the Bill of Rights have penumbras, formed by emanations from those guarantees that help to give them life and substance." Roe was based directly on *Griswold*.

The liberals will choke on this sentence, but “The two politicians of the twentieth century who achieved the greatest good were Winston Churchill and Ronald Reagan.” Without Churchill, Britain falls and the Nazi menace might still be with us. Without Reagan, the evil Soviet empire is still at our throats. The number of human beings who live in freedom today, thanks to those two gentlemen, is counted in the hundreds of millions. Ah, but a liberal might counter with “What about Woodrow Wilson or Franklin Roosevelt? I might begrudgingly acknowledge that Reagan played a role in the West’s victory in WWII, but Roosevelt and Churchill won WWII together and Wilson won WWI.” (Actually a case for Mahatma Gandhi might be made since India is the largest democracy on earth.)

Well, there is a recent book⁶, which asserts that the US entry into WWI, which Wilson engineered, tipped a balance that might have led to a genuine stalemate, a stalemate that could have prevented the rise of both Nazi Germany and Communist Russia. Maybe! But there is no question that Wilson’s “war to make the world safe for democracy” did not achieve its objective; nor did the League of Nations or the Treaty of Versailles—both closely associated with Wilson—lead to any “great good.” On the other hand, Franklin Roosevelt certainly deserves enormous credit for understanding clearly the ominous consequences of not opposing fascism and for leading the free world in combating it. But conversely, I see him, since he is the author of the New Deal, as the instigator of much that is harmful in our economic and social systems. Moreover, he is legitimately criticized for underestimating Stalin and thereby acquiescing to agreements that resulted in the enslavement of Eastern Europe for two generations. But those criticisms aside, his candidacy is disqualified by one inescapable fact: his tangential complicity—intended or not—in the Nazi final solution to the Jewish problem. By not opening the door to Jewish immigration before the war, by seeming to turn a blind eye to Jewish pleas for help⁷ and thereby giving at least an inadvertent green light to Hitler when the screws were tightening, by refusing to acknowledge the slaughter even when it was known to be happening, and by ordering American bombers to avoid the crematoria as they flew over Auschwitz/Birkenau, Roosevelt’s reputation is forever sullied. Had he appeared in front of a camera in 1943 or even 1944 and said, “Herr Hitler, I

6. Jim Powell, *Wilson's War: How Woodrow Wilson's Great Blunder Led to Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, and World War II.*

7. Consult, e.g. the well known stories of the Conference at Evians-les-Bains in 1938 or the voyage of the refugee ship *St. Louis* in 1939.

know what you are doing and I will see to it that you and your cronies are punished appropriately as soon as I get my hands on you,” the Nazis—who attempted to cover up their atrocities when the tide of war turned against them—might well have tempered, or even ceased their genocidal campaign, thereby sparing hundreds of thousands, if not millions of lives.

But I digress. The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 marked a sharp turning point in American political history. The confused, inept and liberal Jimmy Carter was replaced by the bold, clear-thinking and conservative Ronald Reagan. Reagan had three prime objectives: bring down the Evil Empire; restore the American economy by implementing lower taxes and deregulation of government-regulated industries; and dramatically reduce the scope of government. He succeeded in the first two. Through a combination of a serious military build up, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI or Star Wars), economic dynamism (see below), support of local armed resistance to Soviet clients, and moral clarity, he brought the Soviet Union to its knees. Eastern Europe was unshackled and the USSR dissolved in less than a dozen years from his inauguration—with almost no bloodshed! Surely this ranks as one of the great accomplishments of mankind. That we don’t annually celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall or the day the Soviet Union disbanded—as say we celebrate VE Day or VJ day—is a sorry testament to the liberals continued control of the opinion making organs in the country. But in fact, our victory over communism in the Cold War, or WWII, was as great, as important, and as liberating as our victory over fascism.

Reagan’s program to restore the economy also succeeded brilliantly. After a relatively brief, albeit painful recession, the economy responded to the stimuli he fed it with one of the longest economic expansions the country has ever experienced. Aside from an exceedingly mild and transitory recession in George H.W. Bush’s term (grossly exaggerated by the liberal pundits), the economy roared ahead at a record pace for nearly 20 years. During that time, the US put to rest the notion that Japan or the European Union would eclipse us economically. Today, our growth far exceeds theirs, our unemployment is way below theirs and our economic engine makes their look paltry. The only countries that matched us in that period were several East Asian nations (and perhaps Ireland), whose economies also enjoyed open markets, low taxes, deregulation and curtailed welfare state entitlements. Today, new challenges arise in India and China, but these occur long past the Reagan era of the 1980s.

Reagan's triumph was not complete. He failed to reign in the size of government and the leviathan has continued to expand ever since. Also, his triumph over Soviet Communism did not extend to a defeat of Chinese Communism. For a brief period in the spring of 1989 in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, it looked like that victory might be within reach. But the protests of the Chinese students were brutally crushed by the Chinese Army and the Chinese Communist nightmare goes on. Their version of perestroika seems to be working: economic liberalism coupled with social and political repression. Those of us who believe in the power of the idea of liberty cannot fathom how this fundamental contradiction can persevere—but it has for more than 15 years. History and Ronald Reagan would teach that their economic liberty will ultimately either be revoked or will inevitably sweep away the political tyranny. All of us in the free world pray for the latter.

Another area in which Reagan failed was his inability to recognize the face of the war that would follow the one that he was on the verge of winning. He paid some attention to Qaddafi, and when he entered office he made clear to the thugs running the show in Tehran that he, unlike Jimmy Carter, was not to be toyed with. But he retreated ignominiously when the Iranian surrogates in Hezbollah killed over 200 Marines outside of Beirut. This remains a serious blemish on his record, but I just don't think the rise of Islamofascism and Islamic terror was high on his radar screen. He was too busy with his three objectives. But there is no question that a new virulent form of radical Islam was emerging in the 1980s. (It would erupt more violently in the 1990s.) It was perhaps unclear to East and West that the global conflicts of the twentieth century had conspired to keep Islamic passions in check. But once fascism and communism were defeated, and the US was the only major player strutting on the world's stage (benignly at that), radical Islam emerged from its hibernation with a vengeance.

The last major scene from the 1980s that I wish to cite is in the Supreme Court. The liberals, sensing that the tide was turning against them, faced a grave danger. Yes, their control of the media, foundations, universities and law schools was still fundamentally unchallenged. (They would be seriously challenged—at least the first of these—in the 1990s.) But they were getting clobbered in the executive and legislative branches of government—both federal and state. The people were changing their minds and there wasn't much the liberals could do about it. So they identified their red line—the courts. The judges of America had been selected from left leaning lawyers who were produced by the country's similarly inclined law schools. With conservatives increasingly in control of the execu-

tive and legislative branches of government, it would just be a matter of time until “progressive” judges were replaced by “right-wing judicial activists.” This had to be stopped. Enter Robert Bork—and later Clarence Thomas (whose story, although his lynching was in the early 1990s, is appropriately placed here). Bork was the liberal’s nightmare. Two or three appointments like him and all of the Supreme Court’s judicial progressivism dating back to the Warren Court would be in jeopardy, perhaps even undone. Unacceptable! Thus began a scorched earth, fight-to-the-death, no-holds-barred, Marquis of Queensbury rules be damned, campaign to deny Bork a seat on the Court. And it succeeded. Probably because its depth and ferocity was unanticipated by the Right. Similar campaigns were not waged by conservatives against President Clinton’s two nominees, at least one of whom was as far to the left of center as Bork was to the right. Whether this proves that Republicans are more polite than their opponents, or that they really are “the stupid party” as John Stuart Mill characterized all conservative parties, is unclear. What is clear is that the Courts remain largely in liberal hands. Will that last?

Regarding touchstone issues, the needle shook like that of a seismometer. All of the liberal hegemony is suddenly in question—many issues are, for the first time in decades, open to serious discussion. The conservatives were questioning current attitudes on the touchstone items, and people were paying attention and rethinking their positions. This applied to almost all of the issues: but especially to taxes, government regulation, abortion, military spending, gun control, welfare (although in this case more so in the 1990s), and judicial activism. Conservative manifestations of this changed thinking appeared in new organs like the Washington Times, the Heritage Foundation, Paul Weyrich’s direct mail organization, and many more. Conservative talk radio would explode into view somewhat later.

1990-2000. The End of World War III; Beginning of World War IV

The major events:

- The Gingrich revolution;
- America as sole superpower;
- Eruption of Islamic fundamentalism (while America sleeps);
- Kyoto protocol; third way;
- Moral rot.

As announced earlier, I will be purposefully brief and sketchy in this section. Some of the issues mentioned quickly here will be developed more fully in Chapter 8. So, having associated the fall of the Soviet Union and the Clarence Thomas affair with the previous decade, then clearly the 1990s is a decade that “began late.” Some would assert that Bill Clinton’s election in 1992 should count as a turning point. But in fact Clinton governed from a point in the political spectrum not nearly as distant from George H. W. Bush as was the political chasm between Ronald Reagan and Bush I—although of course that chasm would only become readily apparent after the latter’s election. There really was no liberal backlash to Reagan—many in Reagan’s regiments simply chose not to join the Bush brigades when they saw that Bush I was cut from the same cloth as Eisenhower, Nixon, Ford and Rockefeller rather than the staunch conservative mantle of Ronald Reagan. Clinton’s election was the replacement of “liberal light” by the real thing. There was really nothing very dramatic going on. No, the decade began, from a domestic political point of view, in the earthquake called the 1994 congressional elections. The stunning capture of the Senate and House by the Republicans for the first time in more than 40 years, and their subsequent ability to hold onto a Congressional majority through several succeeding elections, which had not happened since the 1920s, was truly a watershed event—the repercussions of which are still with us.

The record of the Republican congress over the last decade will be examined later. Certainly, as the decade progressed, as HillaryCare was defeated, as true welfare reform was rammed down Clinton’s throat, one might conclude that indeed America was becoming more conservative. That may or may not be true, but it clearly wasn’t true of our allies. Leftists won elections all over Europe and Latin America. These elections further entrenched the “non-confrontational and non-judgmental” mood and posture of our allies and reinforced the position of the US as the sole superpower on Earth. Although, in comparison with the behavior of other sole superpowers in history, we did precious, little “throwing of our weight around” in the 1990s (a stance that would change in the next decade/century/millennium), and our behavior caused neither greater trust among our fiends, nor greater fear and respect among our enemies. Regarding the former, their misgivings about our unchallenged power led them to create leveling mechanisms like the Kyoto Protocol, the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, a more robust European Union—replete with its own currency, and even a rather pathetic attempt to initiate a European military counterforce. I do not mean to imply that the Western Alliance was torn asunder, but

unquestionably our allies were uncomfortable with our military supremacy and what they saw as the potential for unchecked military aggressiveness on our part. The following is a drastic oversimplification, but I see this attitude also as a manifestation of the “third way” movement that swept the continent. The idea is as follows: recognizing that “pure” socialism had failed miserably, but believing that the laissez-faire, aggressively free market approach of America was likely to lead to gross inequities among individuals and nations, the enlightened sought a third way somewhere in between. This middle way approach was applied to international politics as well as to domestic economics by the quest for accommodation and conciliation between totalitarian regimes like Communist China and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and free wheeling cowboy America. Personally, I fail to see the distinction (economically) between third way ideas and those of the modern welfare state, and more egregiously the distinction between third way ideas internationally and the tried and false method of appeasement, but Europe’s voters apparently did. Many saw Tony Blair as the epitome of a third way politician, but developments in the next decade would lead them to question that assessment. Clinton also tried to latch onto the third way label, but I don’t think it ever really fit.

Regarding the lack of fear among our enemies, it is now clear in retrospect that our benign neglect helped the emerging Islamic radicalism of the 1980s erupt into a full blown epidemic in the 1990s—although, as I implied, we did our best to ignore the explosion. The pre 9-11 atrocities perpetrated by Muslims are well-known: Mogadishu, World Trade Center I, bombings of the Israeli embassy and cultural center in Latin America, bombing of two American embassies in Africa, the fiendish practice of Palestinian suicide bombers causing carnage and mayhem on Israeli streets, the sneak attack on the USS Cole. We treated these events as if they were criminal activities instead of the opening salvos in WWIV. We were perhaps confused by the horrific bombing perpetrated by Timothy McVeigh, thinking that terrorism might be a ubiquitous affair, not the almost exclusive province of Muslim fanatics. After September 11, such naiveté was no longer possible—although the Left has not given up on it.

I will make one last point before drawing this grand tour to a close. Despite, and maybe independent of, the apparent move to the Right, the US is afflicted by moral rot: rampant pornography on the Internet, violence and promiscuity celebrated in the media, a vicious assault on traditional marriage, schools that teach multicultural drivel instead of pride in America, more than a million abortions

per year—including the particularly heinous practice of “partial birth” abortion, pervasive gambling, an unwillingness to protect our borders, the banishment of religion from our schools and the public square, and the lack of concern at the behavior of an amoral president who compromises the morals of a naïve young lady. What is going on? Keep on reading in Parts II and III to find out.

Surely one of the most misrepresented stories in the history of American journalism must be the North Vietnamese Tet offensive in January, 1968. The American newspapers, led by the New York Times of course, portrayed it as an enormously successful surprise attack that dealt a huge blow to American forces and their South Vietnamese allies. Today we know it was nothing of the sort. In fact, it was a calamitous military defeat for the North Vietnamese and their Vietcong agents—one that could have propelled us to a conclusive victory over the communist forces that were attempting to invade and conquer South Vietnam. But it took many years for the truth to emerge conclusively as the liberal media and liberal politicians who ruled the roost propagated the fiction that we had been surprised and defeated.

I remember being skeptical at the time. Despite the reports of defeat, the numbers seemed to tell a different story; as did the military commanders in the field and a tiny cadre of reporters and politicians who bucked the trend. But I also recall vividly the congealing sentiment around me among my family, friends and colleagues: Vietnam was an unwinnable war; it wasn't a war in which we should have intervened because it was not really an invasion of the South by communist forces from the North supported by the Soviets and Chinese, but rather a civil war between the indigenous Vietcong and the right-wing reactionary forces of General Nguyen van Thieu; it was immoral of us to fight this war and in fact our troops were regularly perpetrating atrocities against innocent Vietnamese villagers. Moreover, the opponents of the war were so certain of the justice of their cause that they saw no harm in engaging in the most egregiously bad conduct: burning American flags, trashing recruitment centers, stealing military records, vilifying our troops, demeaning and maltreating returning veterans, and ascribing to war supporters malevolent intentions and unscrupulous motives.

It was the first time in my life that I began to feel noticeably out of step with my circle of comrades—especially in my two special milieus, my Jewish world and at the university. Indeed my attitude, which did not mesh with the above sentiments at all, could be described essentially as: Vietnam is clearly a hot battle in the Cold War against the Soviets and their proxies; even though the strategic parameters of the struggle might not be in our favor, we must find a way to over-

come those disadvantages—for we will suffer dire consequences if we don't prevail in the struggle; therefore, we should fight to win, not in the self-limiting fashion the Johnson administration (and later the Nixon administration) adopted; there is no question who the bad guys are, and we are not among them; the treasonous behavior of Jane Fonda and others of her ilk should not be excused, but instead punished; and finally, why is it that I have the impression that the war's opponents are actually rooting for the enemy?

Clearly I was moving to the right—at least on this issue. On other issues as well—as later installments in my story will reveal. In fact, I probably would have completed my journey to the Right much sooner than I did, but for one person: Richard Nixon. The loathing for him in my family was so intense (tracing back 20 years), and the resultant programming on my head so effective, that my visceral dislike of the man did not permit me dispassionate thought. I am ashamed to say that in 1972 I voted for George McGovern. I recall nearly choking in the polling booth when I pulled the lever (no touch screens or hanging chads in those days). I instinctively knew that the vote was misguided and contrary to inner feelings and growing beliefs, but I just wasn't ready to cast off the liberal yoke.

More powerful motivating forces were about to come my way—as you will see in future installments at the end of succeeding chapters. Still, as the 1970s unfolded and the war gradually began to recede from the front page, I knew I was out of sync with my liberal brethren when I compiled my summary of what we should have learned from the Vietnam fiasco:

- *The Vietnam War was a great battle in WWII, not some isolated conflagration unrelated to the 45-year war between the free world and Soviet communism. It was a battle that we lost.*
- *We did not lose it militarily, but politically. Our troops held their own and defeated the enemy in open engagements. The political support for the war was killed at home, dooming the effort.*
- *The disrespect and calumny that we heaped on our Vietnam soldiers and vets is a scandalous shame that we as a nation must bear. It was disgusting and historically out of character for the American people.*

- *There was nothing to celebrate in our defeat. Because of that defeat:*
 - *WWIII was prolonged needlessly, lengthening the period of enslavement for peoples behind the iron curtain.*
 - *Death and misery was the lot of millions of people in Southeast Asia. Once the communists got the upper hand, the result was boat people, killing fields, re-education camps and genocidal slaughter (in Cambodia).*
 - *Too many of our own people were crippled by the experience. I speak not so much of the veterans who suffered debilitating injuries or struggled with drug addiction, but more of the young anti-war zealots, who have aged into curmudgeons that cannot see the truth to this day. They maintain beliefs about and profess policies for America that are warped by the tragically wrong conclusions they took away from the conflict. While completely evident today, this last assertion was already clear in the late 70s as the leadership of this group took America down the path of unilateral disarmament and appeasement of our foes.*

Holding these opinions in the mid/late 1970s put me out of the mainstream in my two milieus. It still does. Said otherwise, by the age of 35 I had already gone over to the dark side. However, as you will see, the Vietnam War was only the first of four events, my instinctive reactions to which—together with my self-examination of those reactions—pushed me to alter my political thinking and philosophy from liberal to conservative. The other events were: court-ordered school bussing, Watergate, and a sabbatical year spent in Jerusalem. Those episodes in my life will be described at the conclusion of future chapters.