
EARLY DRAFT
of INTRODUCTION

For more than three-quarters of a century after the Jackson period politics was a major form of mass entertainment in the United States. In small-town America the political meeting compared with the religious revival as a local event and was often attended with the same kind of frenzy. Even today politics is more than negligible as an amusement, but it has been routed from its old place by the radio, the movies, professional sports, and other entertainments. Not only do audiences no longer listen to three- or four-hour political harangues, but they find it incredible that their ancestors did so with pleasure. It may be easy now to forget how much politics partakes of the nature of drama and how much the part of the politician is like the actor's, but the resemblance will force itself upon anyone who studies the spread-eagle personalities of the middle period. No one who has heard of it, for example, can forget the theatrical deathbed scene of that supreme showman, Daniel Webster, who consumed his last minutes with one of his characteristically florid orations punctuated at the close with the query, "Have I--wife, son, doctors, friends, are you all here?-- have I, on this occasion, said anything unworthy of Daniel Webster?"

Webster lived a theatrical existence, and his sense for the stage did not fail even in a solemn moment of his private life. This theatrical milieu, with its prepared entrances and exits, its formulated public poses, its delivery in a falsely spontaneous spirit of well-rehearsed lines, its complete dependence upon craftily designed publicity, is shared by the politician and the actor. For politicians as for actors there is a great variety of possible roles, some of which have a life-like, poignant appeal, but the glare of

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the spotlight is so pitiless and so unremitting that spontaneity and sincerity, as they exist in private relations, are impossible. Social psychologists have learned that some actors identify with their roles on the stage and are emotionally affected by their own performances while others always have a sense of personal estrangement from their parts and go through them without real feeling. Among politicians, I believe, there is probably a similar division, and I suspect that among eminent statesmen belief in one's role--the test of a politician's sincerity--is the rule, not the exception. But sincerity in political life is a cramped and dwarflike thing. In all of life men have to play a succession of roles; the distinctive thing about the politician is the special quality of his public facade and the constant necessity of maintaining it.

Politics, like drama, demands a certain falsifying and heightening of life. A political campaign is like a play, or two competing plays by rival companies. It demands thoughtful staging, good timing, and a sense of climax. It must be planned with regard to the tastes and prejudices of the public. It should have a dynamic and appealing personality in the leading role. It strives for an illusion of reality, and it is dependent upon many operations behind the scenes which audiences must be induced to forget if the illusion is to be sustained.

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The historian of politics and political ideas may have more than one attitude toward this drama. He can tell its story as it is seen by spectators in the audience, taking the characters at their face value. His history then takes on the dramatic values intended by the authors of the script, transfers the fictions of the stage to the printed page, and hands them on to posterity. His readers will, if he is skillful, have the same sort of experience

as if they were attending the theatre themselves. All partisan history is written in this fashion by historians who feel a close identification with the characters on the stage--for example, Claude Bowers in his lively books on Jefferson. Most history which is not partisan in the strict party sense is written in a substantially similar vein by historians who, without quite taking sides between heroes and villains, succumb at any rate to the spell of the drama and record the words and deeds of the play as though they were as real as everything else in life.

It is also possible to look upon the history of these performances in another way. Instead of studying the characters in the play, the historian can concentrate on the actors behind the parts, look closely into the work of the unseen authors of the script, and inquire into the part of the producers with their less artistic, often gross, sometimes sinister motives. Placing himself in the wings, he foregoes re-writing the story of the play and instead records how the play came to be produced. He watches the actors transform themselves into characters, apply greasepaint, change clothes for new roles, rehearse new speeches. His place in the wings is disenchanting, of course. The plays seem familiar; it is as if he has seen each a hundred times. Although he may appreciate an especially effective performance, the dramatic values intended by the authors and actors are largely lost to him. What does arouse his imagination is the life of the theatre itself. If he laughs, he laughs not at the comedies that are performed out front but at the vanities of the actors; and if he weeps it is for tragedies that take place off stage. For him the goal of history-writing is not to reproduce the contents of the plays but to analyse the many things upon which the drama depends. Above all he is moved

by what the sorrows and frustrations of the theatre imply for a larger area of human experience.

I do not wish to carry this analogy too far. While the theatre only represents the rest of life, politics is an organic part of it. The goals of the politician are not fulfilled in his theatrical function alone; nor is his primary service histrionic. What sets him off from the actor, and from many other sorts of men, is that he tries above all else to win and wield power. Max Weber has distinguished between those who live off politics and those who live for it--which we may take to divide the party boss or party hack from the inspired public leader with an ideological message or statesmanlike goal. But whether the politician seeks only to earn an interesting living or to perform some larger service, he must either attain power or become the secret patron of those who do. [In these essays I have written of politicians who have been highly successful, who have articulated basic currents of American popular thought.]

A man does not normally devote his life to the pursuit of power unless he gets some peculiar and distinctive satisfaction from it. The quest for office demands effort and devotion; the quest for high office demands, in addition, force, persistence, talents of a kind, and a personal ambition strong enough to justify the sacrifice of many other values. Politics is a trade which must be plied hard by anyone who expects striking success, and even when a man does not have purely personal ends in mind, this means that he must spend a great deal of time scheming for his personal advancement. There is nothing exceptional about this; it is true of almost every kind of human enterprise in an individualistic and competitive

civilization. But the politician lives under a special kind of disability. Politics operates in a business culture. A man who goes into politics takes with him models of success and standards of conduct derived from the life of business. Public sentiment will not permit such sta

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For example, the purchasing agent of any large corporation expects entertainment and favors from the salesman of any company he deals with, and his acceptance of them is sanctioned as part of the game.

ethic which he is not really trained for, which he cannot always rise up to, but which he dares not repudiate. When in any period like that following the Civil War the ethics of business so openly dominate society that politicians dare to follow them openly, that period is certain to be remembered by historians as a period of corruption and cynicism. Normally, however, the public expects and the political code demands a ceremonious disavowal of personal aims as something shameful and unworthy. Uneasily the politician complies.

But the real life of politics is quite unlike the image which the aspiring statesman sets before himself and his public. [American politics has always been an arena in which conflicts of interests have been fought out, compromised, adjusted. Once these interests were sectional; now they tend more clearly to follow class lines; but from the beginning American political parties, instead of representing single sections or classes clearly and forcefully, have been intersectional and interclass parties, embracing a jumble of interests which often have reasons for contesting among themselves. The politician, who cannot survive in the long run unless his party wins elections, has always tried to compromise the various interests in his party and get them to agree on some

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~~example~~, The purchasing agent for a community, if he receives such favors, must hide them from public notice or face dismissal. The politician has to work within the limits of a (to him) artificial ethic which he is not really trained for, which he cannot always rise up to, but which he dares not repudiate. When in any period like that following the Civil War the ethics of business so openly dominate society that politicians dare to follow them openly, that period is certain to be remembered by historians as a period of corruption and cynicism. Normally, however, the public expects and the political code demands a ceremonious disavowal of personal aims as something shameful and unworthy. Uneasily the politician complies.

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formula ambiguous enough to embrace them all and yet ^{in appearance} appearing sufficiently forthright to enable him to meet the opposing party in a spirit of contemptuous superiority. This task requires tact and duplicity of the sort that is commonly associated with the diplomat, and Professor Wilfred Binkley in his history of American parties aptly speaks of the politician as a "group diplomat." The higher the place the politician reaches, the higher the place to which he aspires, the larger the variety of interests he must combine, and the more difficult his job.

The work of a national politician is trying. He is constantly under compulsion to be cordial to people he does not know, familiar with people he will never see again, pleasant to people for whom he has no use, hostile to people he suspects are good fellows. As the old socialist aphorism has it, he must take votes from the masses and money from the classes. He is constantly engaged in manipulating the public mind and designing ways to influence it, but he must try to avoid becoming cynical about his constituents. He is under the constant strain of presenting conflicts of interests as conflicts of ideals, of pretending that some conflicts do not exist, of exaggerating others that hardly exist at all. He must on occasion put together a hodgepodge of contradictory ideas and yet try to sound forceful. If he holds some fairly unequivocal principle on which to go before the public he will almost certainly have to bargain away a large part of it in the course of the legislative process; and then he must return to his constituency with a plausible explanation. If through some fortunate circumstance he can survive for a time without doing the usual devious and compromising things, he must still work closely with a party organization that does. If he is a Lincoln or a

Franklin D. Roosevelt he will have his Camerons or Hagues and Kellys.

American political folklore, which vacillates between abject credulity and intense skepticism, sometimes has it that politicians are a parasitic group--a prejudice reflected in the homespun judgment that "Politicians are all crooks." Political scientists and historians usually look on the matter differently. They approach social problems as a sort of unofficial priesthood of the present order and the national interest. They are fond of pointing out that as long as conflicts do exist issues must be settled by compromise if law and order are to be kept. They find great merit in statesmen for bringing together in gentlemanly compromise interests that might otherwise be at each other's throats, and thus fending off domestic disorder, forging national unity, and enhancing the group's capacity for defense or aggression. They therefore take a casual and indulgent attitude toward any unseemly personal qualities that are cultivated in the profession. And sober second thought among the people, as shown by the stability of the parties and the longevity of many political careers, evidently accepts the judgment. In sum, politics ranks with other professions which suffer moral disfavor but are conceded by most people to serve an essential civic function.

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Such a calling selects a specialized personnel. The eminent national politician, while indulging in the actor's pose and the diplomat's duplicity, must keep the inward feeling and the outward appearance of integrity. An excess of self-examination would be paralyzing to a man who lives this way. He must be capable of believing in himself in the teeth of the evidence, of living in an intellectual and moral twilight in which outlines are softened

and values obscured. An incurable habit of self-deception is the primary occupational disease of politics.

I do not mean to charge the politician with habitual and organic insincerity, much less dishonesty. There has been much of both in American politics; they have invaded even the top leadership during dissolute periods like the Grant and Harding eras; but the men I have chosen to write about here are among America's first statesmen, and I do not believe that either venality or insincerity is usually characteristic at that level. I am, however, trying to emphasize what a singular kind of psychological feat the politician's sincerity is. Politics demands a remarkable capacity for rationalization, both public and private. In the post-Freudian era, ~~when the concept of the unconscious is so familiar,~~ it is not difficult to understand how seemingly disreputable or interested conduct can go hand in hand with serene consciousness of rectitude. A hundred years before Freud, Jefferson remarked, "All know the influence of interest on the mind of man, and how unconsciously his judgment is warped by that influence." Roger Brooke Taney left an extremely sensitive and sympathetic record of this process. Writing of a certain Congressman who accepted a large loan from the United States Bank and then voted to support it, Taney said:

Now I do not mean to say that he was directly bribed to give this vote. From the character he sustained and from what I know of him I think he would have resented any thing that he regarded as an attempt to corrupt him. But he wanted the money--and felt grateful for the favor: and perhaps he thought that an institution which was so useful to him, and had behaved with so much kindness, could not be injurious or dangerous to the public, and that it would be as well to continue it. Men under the influence of interest or passion...do not always acknowledge even to themselves the motives upon which they really act. They sometimes persuade themselves that they are acting on a motive consistent with their own self-respect, and sense of right, and shut their eyes to the one which in fact governs their conduct.

The historian has his best opportunity to observe the most naked political rationalization when some politician, impelled by changes in public opinion, finds it necessary to reverse his position completely on some major issue. This first began to happen during the rapid social changes of the early republic. Webster and Calhoun in response to changes in Massachusetts and South Carolina both shifted their position on states rights versus nationalism and many associated economic issues. Jackson did not become a conscious spokesman of mass protest until after he was president. Lincoln, after many long years of indifference and equivocation on the slavery issue, underwent a sudden conversion to ardent free-soilism after that issue became important in the 1850's. Bryan, quite candidly, took up free silver after he discovered that it was the most popular issue among Nebraska farmers. Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, after many years of devotion to highly conservative principles, discovered the merits of progressivism when they were thrust before the public. Although these conversions were opportune, I find it hard to believe that they were inspired by calculating self-interest alone. These men would not have had the force to convince others of the importance of their ideas if they had not first convinced themselves. A margin of sincerity helps to select such men out of the mass; there may be a premium on easy-going cynicism in the alderman, but not in the presidential aspirant.

[One of the figures in this book, Wendell Phillips, is not a politician in the ordinary sense. I chose to include him in part because I thought abolitionism was politically important enough to warrant a representative in this study and because I found Phillips the most interesting of the abolitionists; but also because I wanted to contrast one agitator to my politicians. The agitator, in Karl

Mannheim's language, tends to be a utopian, the politician an ideological thinker. The agitator sets a high value in imposing his ideas upon the public (which he calls educating the masses) rather than adapting popular ideas to the uses of his own career. The power of persuasion, if he can exercise it, satisfies him more than the power of office. Where the politician is equivocal, the agitator is forthright and uncompromising. He expects to alienate many people in the course of his propagandising, and consoles himself with the thought that his ideas will prevail in the long run. Of necessity, then, he values the long range of human development rather than immediate or piecemeal accomplishment. He can see only those forces at work which may undermine the existing order and closes his eyes to the things which are above all valuable to the politician--the things that make for stability. He has a small sense of party but a large sense for principle, dogma, and doctrine; where the politician may get into intellectual tangles from the effort to combine conflicting interests, the agitator does so from the effort to force life into an unduely logical pattern. The agitator, instead of molding interests into workable compromises is forever trying to bring into the open the latent conflicts in society.]

If the agitator has great success in popularizing his ideas they are likely to be taken over by the politician in some dilute form. Sometimes an unintended, informal, unrecognized collaboration results. For example, Abraham Lincoln, was designing a new slave-catching law for the District of Columbia while Wendell Phillips was facing mobs in the interest of abolition, but Lincoln has passed into mythology as the Great Emancipator, and Phillips is remembered by historians as an irresponsible fanatic. Actually the task--or historic mission as Marxists call it--of abolishing

slavery could not have been accomplished if both types of men had not existed. The ideas of agitators, in the hands of practical statesmen, generally fall far short of agitational ideals. Grant was to Phillips and Garrison what Napoleon was to Robespierre and St. Just, or Stalin to Lenin and Trotzky.

[In each of these essays I have concentrated on a few dominant ideas, a few illustrative phases of the subjects' careers, mindful that brief studies must be done with few strokes. My method has less in common with the glossy, painstaking portraiture in official commissioned portraits than with caricature; but I have tried to remember that the successful caricaturist stresses traits that are conspicuous in the subject and that good caricature is always instantly recognizable.]

A word about the quality of the portraits. I am looking upon these statesmen primarily as purveyors of ideas to the public, which is one of their more vulnerable aspects. Moreover, I am not interested in adding to the already superabundant hero literature. We are so saturated with hero mythology that it demands a certain effort of the imagination to accept obvious and commonplace facts about our statesmen. To recognize unusual qualities in public figures may be no more than accurate and just, but to celebrate them endlessly and uncritically detracts from our knowledge of social processes and even saps the will to action, by inducing a popular feeling of complacency or dependence. After recent experience with authoritarian states, it should hardly be necessary to point to the dangers of the Leader cult. It may be a useful thing to emphasize in addition that even when leaders are democratic in philosophy and practice, hero cults have their pitfalls. To centralize one's conception of social achievement in a few personalities, to exaggerate

the beneficence, thoroughness, wisdom, or infallibility of great men, is to minimize the role of the people themselves in producing, training, and educating their leaders, pressing them on to action, and breaking through rigid barriers of outworn tradition. In studying eminent politicians who have "led" popular sentiment, I have been impressed again and again not so much by what they have brought into politics as what they have learned there from exposure to the popular will. There is a perpetual tendency for the exercise of power to create a psychological gap between an officialdom and the people, for leadership to lose touch with popular feelings and needs, to grow contemptuous and cynical and take a cold manipulative attitude toward the masses. This tendency is particularly dangerous in the modern era of corporation capital, international tension, centralized communications, and skilled propaganda. Perhaps never in history has there been a more compelling need for constant critical evaluation of those who hold power. One of the best guides to such evaluation is a cold appraisal of those who have held power in the past.

X { Societies which are in good working order have about them a kind of mute organic consistency. They do not foster ideas which will revolutionize their fundamental working arrangements. Such ideas are slowly and persistently insulated, as an oyster deposits nacre around an irritant; they are ^{confined to} left in the custody of small groups of agitators and alienated intellectuals and, except in revolutionary times, do not get into the hands of practical politicians. Since practical politicians hardly dare to go outside the climate of opinion which defines their culture, the range of ideas which they can normally use is relatively narrow. When they quarrel over rival interests they tend to dramatize the conflicts

in their ideas, but the similarities are just as important because the similarities define the limits within which they can act. In the course of time the rival material interests involved become obsolete and are replaced by others; but men's minds do not change as fast as the material facts: the rival ideas survive and are used by the historians who inherit them to reconstruct the original battles. The consequence is that historians usually follow politicians in levelling the spotlight on differences and ignoring the common climate of opinion. For example, traditional history stresses bitter disagreements that had to be compromised in the Constitutional Convention of 1787; only [in the last generation] did philosophical historians begin to see how important it was that the members of the convention, with very few exceptions, shared the same general goals and a common political philosophy. Again, the Jeffersonians and Federalists raged at each other, but once Jefferson took power practical differences in policy boiled down to a very modest minimum. Few political battles in history have been as keen as the Lincoln-Douglas debates; ^{yet} in our own time the foremost Lincoln scholar, Professor James G. Randall, has commented more than once that, considering the full range of possible policies on the issues, Lincoln and Douglas were substantially on the same side of the fence. To write about the history of political ideas from such a standpoint is to give up most of the melodramatic values, but history can be conceived as something other than melodrama.

In these essays I have tried to keep sight of what I believe to be the main thread in American political ideology--something shared in large part by men as diverse as Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Cleveland, Bryan, Wilson, and Hoover--and to show how it was adapted to the needs of various interests. This central faith

has been a belief in property, individualism, and enterprise. American political controversy in the past has always taken place between propertied classes--farm property versus industrial or financial property, small property versus large property. Dominant political ideologies have been variants of an underlying philosophy of capitalist enterprise, and at any ^{moment} ~~time~~ in history the real variations in practical policy that have been possible within the limits of this philosophy have been small. *not exactly*

The American has always had faith in the sanctity of private property, the right of the individual to dispose and invest it, and the natural evolution of self-interest and cupidity, within broad legal limits, into a beneficent order. The business of politics--so the faith runs--is to protect this order, to foster it on occasion, to patch up its "incidental" abuses, but not to cripple it by interference, and above all not to replace it with a plan for common collective action. American traditions show a marked prejudice in favor of equalitarian democracy, but it has been a democracy of cupidity rather than a democracy of fraternity.

The American worships new discoveries and new gimcracks. In politics, however, his reverence for the past is enormous, and it has grown with each generation. The Founding Fathers dreamed of and planned for the future. Webster and Clay's generation was absorbed with the present. Lincoln believed that he was stabilizing the America of his time. But beginning with the time of Bryan, the American political ideal has been steadily fixed in the past, and the goal of action has been a restoration of past institutions. It is striking how much American political change has taken place in the name of a return to a golden age. Lincoln, who helped to build a new party, uprooted slavery and the aristocratic agrarian culture of the South, led a revolutionary change in the structure of national

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political power, and paved the way for the success of industrial capitalism, did all these things in the name of restoring the Union as it was, saving the common man's control of the government, and protecting existing rights of free labor. After him Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, La Follette, and Wilson all proclaimed that they were trying to undo the mischief of the previous forty years and return to the past of limited and decentralized power, competition, opportunity, and enterprise. Even Herbert Hoover, who is not thought to have much in common with these men of the Progressive era, and whose methods in fact were quite different, accepted the same goals.

The development of an increasingly retrospective and nostalgic cast of mind in American politics has gone hand in hand with the decline of the traditional faith. When competition and enterprise were rising, men thought of the future; when they were flourishing, men thought of the present. Now--in this age of concentration, bigness, and corporate monopoly--when competition and enterprise have gone into steep decline, men gaze wistfully back toward a golden age. The debacle of the Hoover Administration was the logical consequence of trying to erect nostalgia into a principle of action and guide the future on assumptions that reach two hundred years into the past.

Franklin D. Roosevelt is unique among the statesmen of modern American liberalism--and indeed among all American statesmen since Hamilton--in his recognition of the need for novelty and daring, his sense of the failure of tradition. But his capacity ^{did not compare with his capacity for innovations in practical measures} for innovation in ideas, and the New Deal by no means marks a clean break with the traditions of the past. ~~Festless intellectuals have~~ ^{It has been} said again and again that we need a new conception of the world to replace the fading tradition of self-help, free enterprise,

competition, and beneficent cupidity, but no new ideas have yet taken root. There is a general sense of the inadequacy of the old, but no conception of the new. Bereft of a coherent tradition, Americans have become more receptive than ever to dynamic personal leadership as a substitute. This is a large part of the answer to F. D. Roosevelt's popularity and to the present rudderless and demoralized state of American liberalism.

When I began writing these essays I was searching not for a broad interpretation of American political traditions but rather for specific insights into the thought and character of a ~~group~~^{series} of influential men. Each of these men was chosen as a figure of ⁿ singular human interest who represented one of the main currents in American political sentiment. With one exception, Wendell Phillips--whom I included in part to introduce a contrast between the agitator and the practical politician and in part to represent the abolitionist movement--these men were practical politicians and officeholders, who became eminent because they voiced the sentiments and aspirations of great numbers of Americans.

The personalities and ideas of such men are public institutions. Much has been written about their ideas, but it has been chiefly about political and legal theory in the narrow sense—about federalism and sovereignty, nationalism and union, and the ~~relation of democracy to specific reforms~~^{place of issues, in democratic politics}. But such political and legal ideas rest upon more sweeping assumptions—ideas about the ~~proper values~~^{relations} of the economic classes, about labor and race, competition and monopoly, the function of government, ~~the very nature of man himself~~^{the direction of social evolution}. Whatever their limitations, American political leaders have been social as well as political thinkers, and it is ~~in~~^{from} this ~~light~~^{perspective} that I have approached them.

My essential interest was not to repeat familiar interpretations, however true, but to emphasize interpretations important to an understanding of our history which have been neglected. For example, in writing of Jefferson, I did not find it necessary to restate at length the democratic and humanistic sentiments which have made him a hero of modern liberal democrats. Instead I attempted to place his ideas more closely in their historical setting, to locate their specific meanings for his own ~~time~~^{age}, to indicate certain crucial changes of meaning which time has imposed upon them, to examine Jefferson's inconsistencies and contradictions, and to search out the ~~significant~~ difficulties which he encountered when he tried to translate his moral preferences into political realities. From the beginning it seemed to me that his economic conceptions were of comparable importance ^{with} ~~to~~ his political ideals in deciding not only his own course of action but also the continuing intellectual bias of the American democratic tradition. Further, it seemed that there were some crucial incongruities in his ideas which, as time passed, became increasingly important.

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Again, in treating Abraham Lincoln I assumed that his sentiments about slavery, his nationalism, ~~his contribution to emancipation~~ his stature as a wise and humane statesman, are quite familiar. I turned instead to some of the poignant contradictions in his life and work, and in the ~~very~~ Lincoln mythology itself, which struck me as equally illuminating about American experience. In dealing with the lives and thought of such men as Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, and Wilson, I concluded that it would be valuable to turn attention once again ~~mainly~~ not so much to the fresh and challenging impact of their more progressive ideas as to the fundamentally tame impulses with which these ideas were linked, the conservative and stabilizing effects which they were intended to have. Otherwise it seemed impossible to understand the ultimate failure of Progressive America.

Working on such a plan made it necessary to leave much out, not merely matters of detail, but important perspectives. There is a school of biographical portraiture which is notable for complete, faithful, and somewhat glossy reproduction of detail. However, it is difficult, even in a full-length biography, to see a human being whole, and doubly difficult when the subject is one ~~in whom a~~ ^{whose personal} ~~private~~ career intersects with public affairs of the ~~most~~ broadest implications. I decided to abandon the goal of a complete and tempered perspective in favor of seeing steadily something in particular and exploiting as fully as possible its implications for general understanding. I have adhered, then, to the method of the caricaturist with his deliberate exaggeration of salient features; but I have tried to remember that a good caricature is instantly recognizable to those who know the subject.

As these essays progressed, I found that the motive which animated them--the search for the important and unfamiliar--brought them into a more unified focus than I had anticipated: I was forced again and again to place in the foreground the common climate of opinion which embraced both parties to political conflicts. It is generally recognized that American politics has been a series of conflicts between special interests--between landed capital and financial or industrial capital, between old and new enterprises, large and small property--and that it has not shown, at least until recently, many signs of that struggle between the propertied and unpropertied classes which is forecast in Marxian doctrine. What has not been sufficiently recognized is the effect of all this upon political thought. The fierceness with which some political struggles have been waged has, ^{at times} been ~~misleading~~ misleading; for the range of vision embraced by the primary contestants in the major parties has always been bounded by the horizons of property and enterprise. However much at odds on other issues, the major political traditions have shared a belief in the rights of property, the philosophy of economic individualism, the value of competition; they have accepted the economic virtues of capitalist culture as necessary qualities of man. Even when some property right has been challenged--as it was by followers of Jefferson and Jackson--in the name of the rights of man or the rights of the community, the challenge, when translated into practical policy, has actually been urged on behalf of some other kind of property.

Almost the entire span of American history under the present Constitution has taken place during the rise and spread of modern industrial capitalism. In material power and productivity the United States has been a flourishing success. Now Societies like this ~~societies~~ which are in good working order, have a kind of mute organic consistency. They do not foster ideas which are hostile to their fundamental working arrangements. Such ideas may appear, but when they do they are slowly and persistently insulated, as an oyster deposits nacre around an irritant. They are confined to small groups of agitators and alienated intellectuals, and except in revolutionary times they do not get into the hands of practical politicians. The range of ideas which the practical politicians can conveniently believe in is ^{normally} limited by the common climate of opinion which sustains their culture.

As time passes the rival material interests in any political struggle are likely to become obsolete and to be replaced by others; but since men's minds do not change with comparable rapidity, the rival ideas survive and are used by the historians who inherit them to reconstruct the original battles. The consequence is that historians usually follow politicians in levelling the spotlight on differences and ignoring the common climate of opinion. ~~For example,~~ traditional history ^{tells of} ~~describes~~ the bitter disagreements that had to be compromised in the Constitutional Convention of 1787; only in recent times have philosophical historians begun to see how important it was that the members of the convention, with very few exceptions, shared the same general goals and a common political philosophy. After the Constitution was adopted the Jeffersonians and Federalists raged at each other with every appearance of a bitter and indissoluble difference; but once Jefferson took power, differences in practicable policy boiled down to a very modest minimum, and before long the two parties were indistinguishable. It has been the custom, especially of the Jeffersonian tradition, of partisan historians to exploit the drama of the conflict in ideas between Jefferson and his opponents. But if it is valid to test the ^{the} practical meaning of ideas ^{is to be tested} by their consequences, ~~it is also valid~~ ^{we must} pay further attention to the fact that the programmatic consequences of these ideas were by no means so different. This seems to me to be one of the keys to an understanding of American history.

In these essays, therefore, I have ^{tried} without neglecting the conflicts, ~~tried~~ to keep sight of what I believe to be the central faith in American political ideologies--something shared in large part by men as diverse as Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Cleveland, Bryan, Wilson, and Hoover--and to show how it was adapted to the needs of various interests. This has been a faith in the sanctity of private property, the right of the individual to dispose and invest it, and the natural evolution of self-interest and self-assertion, within broad legal limits, into a beneficent order. The business of politics--so the faith runs--is to protect this order, to foster it on occasion, to patch up its "incidental" abuses, but not to cripple it by interference, and above all not to replace it with a plan for common collective action. American traditions show a marked prejudice in favor of equalitarian democracy, but it has been a democracy of cupidity rather than a democracy of fraternity.

In science and technology the American worships new discoveries and new gimcracks. In politics, however, he has developed an enormous reverence for the past. The Founding Fathers dreamed of and planned for the future. The generation

of Webster ~~and~~ ^{and Calhoun} Clay was busily absorbed with the present. Lincoln believed that he was stabilizing his America and erecting bulwarks against undesirable change. Although he helped to build a new party, uprooted slavery and the aristocracy of the South, led a revolutionary change in the structure of national power, and paved the way for the success of industrial capitalism, he did all these things in the name of restoring the Union as it was, saving the common man's control of the government, and protecting existing rights of free labor. Beginning with the time of Bryan the American ideal, ~~has been~~ ^{has made} steadily fixed in the past, its goal a restoration of past institutions and conditions. Among the heroes of the Progressive revival in American political culture, Bryan, La Follette, and Wilson proclaimed that they were trying to undo the mischief of the previous forty years and recreate an America of limited and decentralized power, genuine competition, opportunity, and enterprise. Even Theodore Roosevelt, ^{realized and candidly stated} ~~was candid enough to state~~ the ^{inevitably} ~~limitations~~ of such ^{an} ~~undertaking~~ ^{was} careful to do things which would cause him to be accepted as a "trustbuster." ^{Among post-war statesmen} ~~Herbert Hoover~~, who is not usually thought to have much in common with these men of the Progressive era--and whose methods and temper, in fact, were quite different--still adhered to the same fundamental premises and accepted the same goals.

The development of an ^{this} ~~increasingly~~ retrospective and nostalgic cast of mind in American politics has gone hand in hand with the decline of the traditional faith. When competition and enterprise were rising, men thought of the future; when they were flourishing, of the present. Now--in an age of concentration, bigness and corporate monopoly--when competition, enterprise, and opportunity have gone into decline, men gaze wistfully back toward a golden age and ^{contemplate} ~~think~~ of the future with anxiety. Franklin D. Roosevelt stands out among the statesmen of modern American liberalism--and indeed among all statesmen since Hamilton--ⁱⁿ his ~~marked~~ recognition of the need for novelty and daring, his sense of the failure of tradition. ~~Among~~ ~~the most important members of the New Deal~~ ~~men~~ But his capacity for innovation in ideas did not compare with his capacity for innovations in practical measures, and ^{no clearly articulated} ~~the New Deal by no means~~ ~~marked a sharp break with tradition.~~ ^{break with the common faith could be found in the New Deal's} ~~It~~ has been said again and again ^{in recent years} that we need a new conception of the world to replace the fading ^{ideology} ~~tradition~~ of self-help, free enterprise, competition, and benevolent cupidity, ~~but~~ no such conception has yet taken root. Bereft of a coherent and plausible ^{body of belief,} ~~tradition,~~ Americans have become more receptive than ever to dynamic personal leadership as a substitute. This is ~~also~~ part of the answer to Franklin Roosevelt's popularity and ^{since his death,} ~~to the present~~ rudderless and demoralized state of American liberalism.

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