Chapter 25

THE AMERICAN DESTINY

INTRODUCTION

We have that plenty and abundance of ordinances and means of grace, as few people enjoy the like; we are as a city set upon a hill, in the open view of all the earth. The eyes of the world are upon us.

PETER BULKELEY

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

EMMA LAZARUS

The land we live in seems to be strong and active. But how fares the land that lives in us?

GROVER CLEVELAND

"THE LAND which has no history," the Italian economist Loria said — the words were quoted by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 — "reveals luminously the course of universal history." "He is right," Turner remarked. "The United States lies like a huge page in the history of society. Line by line as we read from west to east we find the record of social evolution." A half century before Turner, Alexis de Tocqueville, the perceptive aristocratic French visitor, had concurred. The old nations of Europe should look to America, he said, to discover what their future would be.

Many Americans and many foreigners still feel that way. The twentieth century was to be the American century — so we said in 1900, so we said after each of the world wars, so we say, though perhaps a little less surely, today. And has it not turned out to be so? Do not most of us feel that what happens to America will largely determine what happens to the world?

With good reason, it would seem. The United States is now the most powerful nation on earth; it is the most powerful nation the earth has ever seen. We therefore influence, if we do not directly control, the destinies of continents and of peoples. Decisions made in Washington affect the lives of

British diplomats, of Japanese scientists, of Indian peasants. We know that we can destroy the earth. We hope that we will be able to save it, and not only save it but help all of its inhabitants to achieve the kind of life of which, so far, they have only dreamed. We have the power. We can do these things — if we will.

There are other things that we can do with our power. America's power for good is also a power for evil; instead of realizing the dreams of other men in other nations, we can turn those dreams into nightmares.

This is "the paradox of power," as an issue of *Atlas* magazine called it in 1967. Asians, on the whole, think of the United States as a "warmonger" — a nation wholly intent on running the rest of the world and perfectly willing to use military force to effect its ends. Europeans are more ambivalent — they know us better — and are involved in a "love-hate affair," as *Atlas* put it, "with the U.S.A."

A French writer in a leading Paris newspaper, *L'Express,* tried to sum up his country's ambiguous attitude toward us. He described an interchange between the head of the Renault Company, France's leading automobile producer, and President Charles de Gaulle. "There, Mr. President, is our enemy," said the automobile maker, pointing to the General Motors exhibit at the Salon de l'automobile in 1967. "Mr. Company Director," replied De Gaulle, "that's just what I've been saying for the past twenty years."

The irony, of course, is that whereas the Renault president meant "competitor," the political president really meant "enemy." But even that realization does not solve the problem. The French journalist went on to examine the general attitude, political and economic, high and low, of all Frenchmen, not just these two leaders. He conceded that many Frenchmen were offended by the question that so many American businessmen seem to ask — implicitly, if not out loud: "If you Europeans are so intelligent, how come you're not rich?"

"It's about time we asked ourselves that question," the journalist concluded. "Because it's not only in dollars that they are rich. They are rich in ideas, in inventions, in science, in technology, in power. And they are rapidly imposing their rule on the industrial world. It's about time we realized it. If we don't, Europe will become, simply, a sub-America."

We have not always had such power, but we have always tended to feel that the future of mankind was inextricably bound up with our own. It is a strange thing that we who had no history, who had no accomplishments and no successes, were certain from the beginning that what we did would reveal to the rest of mankind what *it* could do. If we succeeded in the experiment that for three centuries many believed America to be making, then the world would know that it, too, could achieve the greatness we saw, sometimes but dimly, in ourselves. And if we failed, then the world would know that it, too, must fail.

The heavy burden of our destiny permeates, and has always permeated, every aspect of our life. We have said that we were not like other peoples, that our actions would be considered as examples, that the world would learn about man from us, who nevertheless were and are only men. We have suffered under this burden from the beginning; some have ridiculed us for even thinking that we bore it.

We ourselves have been merciless in our criticism of foreign leaders — Lenin, Hitler, and De Gaulle are but three examples — who have felt the same and have tried to instill into *their* followers the feeling that the world's destiny was involved with their own. We insist, and have always insisted, that the conception applies only to us. To deny the natural emotion of patriotism to others is fraught with danger and disappointment. But, we say, our idea of the role we were called upon to play, and must continue to play, in the theater of the world is

more than a patriotic delusion. It is a role that was given us, not one that we took upon ourselves; we are the chosen rather than the choosers. That too has brought suffering, for it has made us our own severest critics.

However, the belief that ours and the world's history are somehow one, that we are the last, but also the best, hope of earth, that the destiny of America is that of mankind, is ineradicable in most of us. And the belief has, by and large, been more of an inspiration than a hindrance. Henry Adams, in his *History of the United States,* described the resources, both natural and human, of the Americans in the year 1800, and outlined the problems, again both natural and human, that they faced. It was obvious, he said, writing in the 1880s, that the problems could not be solved with the means at hand. But they *were* solved, as Adams knew. No material reasons could be given, he suggested, for this success; the reasons had to be spiritual, mysterious, hard to put a finger on. In the end, perhaps all that one could say was that the Americans knew that they had to do it, and so did it. The world was watching, they thought, and they could not fail.

In the following pages, we discuss some of the reasons Americans have given for their belief in their high destiny. And we also — because it has been an important strain in American life and thought — mention some of the respects in which they have thought and said that the American promise has not been fulfilled. These charges against America are discussed mainly in the last section.

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Title page of "The New World" by Montanus, 1671

1. A CITY SET UPON A HILL: AMERICA AS AN EXAMPLE FOR THE WORLD

THAT AMERICA and the Americans were chosen by God to set an example to the world was a proposition firmly asserted by the first New Englanders, and reasserted by many of our countrymen down to the present day. Gov. John Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony was one of the first to affirm it, and in so doing he used an image that had long been evocative.

The fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew tells how Jesus went up "on the mountain, and when He sat down His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth and taught them." What He taught them was of course the Beatitudes, and in the course of propounding these fundamental Christian teachings He told them: "You are the light of the world. A city set upon a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven."

According to Winthrop, those famous words were meant, sixteen centuries later, to apply directly to the struggling colonists of Massachusetts Bay. God "will make our name a praise and glory," he wrote, "so that men shall say of succeeding plantations: 'The Lord make it like that of New England.' For we must consider that we shall be like a City upon a Hill; the eyes of all people are on us. If we deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world; we shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God and all believers in God."

Winthrop wrote in 1630, a time of great hope; twenty-one years later, in a time of discouragement, the Rev. Peter Bulkeley, a minister at Concord, Massachusetts, and a founder of the town, used the same compelling image to proclaim New England's importance in the world. "For ourselves here," Bulkeley declared, "the people of New England, we should in a special manner labor to shine forth in holiness above other people. We have that plenty and abundance of ordinances and means of grace, as few people enjoy the like; we are as a city set upon a hill, in the open view of all the earth. The eyes of the world are upon us . . . and therefore not only the Lord our God, with whom we have made covenant, but heaven and earth, angels and men, that are witnesses of our profession, will cry shame upon us if we walk contrary to the covenant. . . . If we open the mouths of men against our profession, by reason of the scandalousness of our lives, we (of all men) shall have the greater sin." And he added: "Let us study so to walk that this may be our excellency and dignity among the nations of the world among which we live; that they may be constrained to say of us, only this people is wise, a holy and blessed people."

It was a high destiny and a heavy burden, as we have said, but Americans have not ceased to assume it down through the years. President George Washington assumed it in his First Inaugural Address, in 1789; forty-eight years later, in 1837, President Andrew Jackson assumed it, too, in his Farewell Address. "Providence has showered on this favored land blessings without number and has chosen you as the guardians of freedom to preserve it for the benefit of the human race," Jackson said. "May He who holds in His hands the destinies of nations make you worthy of the favors He has bestowed and enable you, with pure hearts and pure hands and sleepless vigilance, to guard and defend to the end of time the great charge he has committed to your keeping." The Englishman James Bryce noted in 1888 that "religious minds hold — you find the idea underlying many books and hear it in many pulpits — that Divine Providence has specially chosen and led the American people to work out a higher type of freedom and civilization than any other state has yet attained." Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York assumed it during World War II. "I believe in America," he wrote in 1943, "in her high destiny under God to stand before the people of the earth as a shining example of unselfish devotion to the ideals that have, under God, made us a great nation. . . . I believe in America," he concluded, "because I believe in God and God's Providence that has been over us from the earliest days of our beginning." And the Americans who have said substantially the same thing, from the middle of the seventeenth century to the middle of the twentieth, are almost numberless.

Strictly speaking, all have not said the same thing, for all have not named God or Providence in their proclamations. Jackson's point — that Americans were chosen as the guardians of freedom — has been made with no explicit reference to God. Thus Daniel Webster, for example, noting in 1824 that "ours is now the great republic

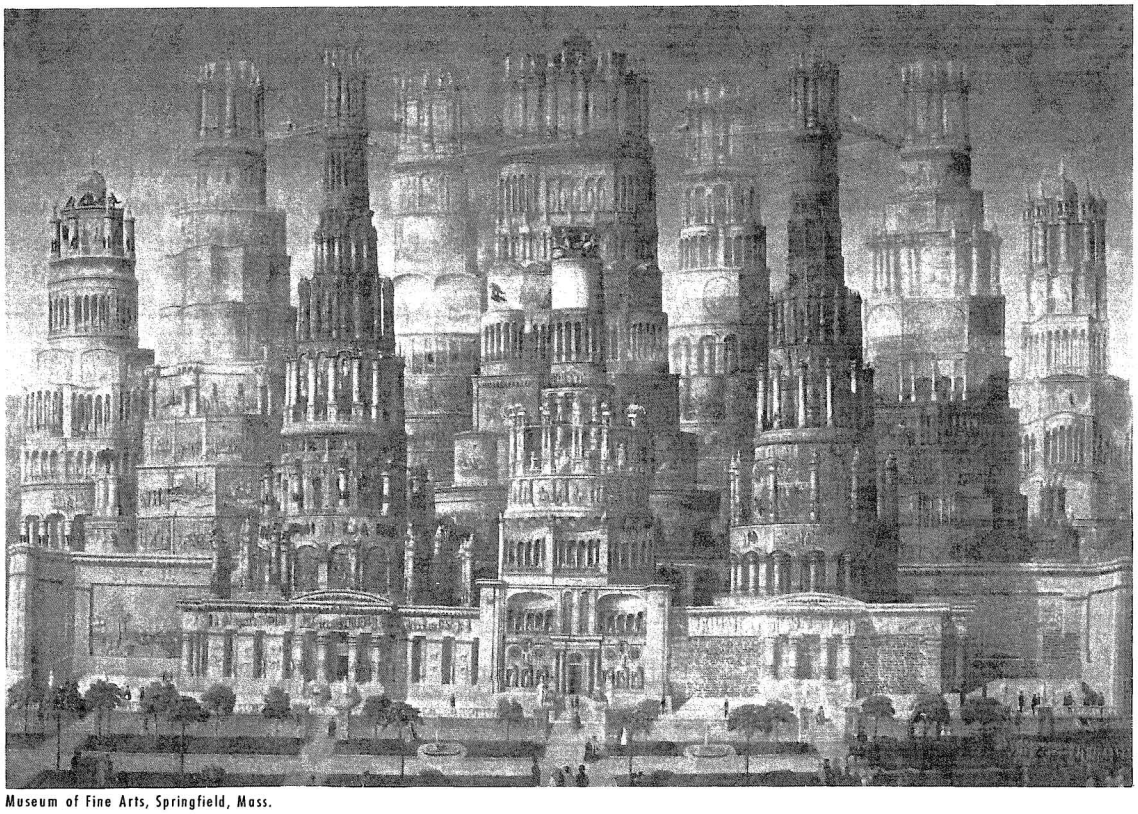
of the earth," could go on to say that "as a free government, as the freest government, its growth and strength compel it, willing or unwilling, to stand forth to the contemplation of the world. We cannot obscure ourselves, if we would; a part we must take, honorable or dishonorable, in all that is done in the civilized world." In his "New Nationalism" speech of 1910, Theodore Roosevelt in effect concurred. Declaring that "the history of America is now the central feature of the history of the world; for the world has set its face hopefully toward our democracy," he urged his fellow citizens to remember that "each one of you carries on your shoulders not only the burden of doing well for the sake of your own country, but the burden of doing well and seeing that this nation does well for the sake of mankind." And in the winter of 1945, as World War II was drawing to a close, Henry A. Wallace described America's war efforts and declared that "thus has America become the symbol — the world over — for the dynamic force of a free people fighting for a free world."

Wallace was not the last to make the point. "Let every nation know," said John F. Kennedy in his Inaugural Address, delivered January 20, 1961, "that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship . . . to assure the survival and the success of liberty." And the young President, urging his fellow Americans not to ask what their country could do for them but what they could do for it, added these words: "My fellow citizens of the world — ask not what America will do for you but what together we can do for the freedom of man."

Nor has it ended there. Look in today's newspaper. The chances are good that you will find someone saying that American freedom is the exemplar of the world.

The maintenance and support of liberty at home and abroad is only one, though the most important, of the respects in which America has been held to be the world's great example. George Washington, urging his Revolutionary Army to disband and dissolve itself in 1783, told them that thereby "you will give one more distinguished proof of unexampled patriotism and patient virtue . . . and you will, by the dignity of your conduct, afford occasion for posterity to say, when speaking of the glorious example you have exhibited to mankind, 'Had this day been wanting the world had never seen the last stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining.' " Alexander Hamilton thought that the ratification of the U.S. Constitution afforded such an opportunity. It had been often remarked, he wrote in the first of the *Federalist* papers, that it seemed to have been reserved to the people of America, by their conduct and example, to decide the question "whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force." And he added that "a wrong election of the part we shall act may, in this view, deserve to be considered as the general misfortune of mankind."

For Tocqueville, as for many others, it was the establishment of American equality that could serve as such an example. Tocqueville wrote his *Democracy in America,* he said, because he had been struck, during his 1831-1832 visit, by "the general equality of conditions among the people." Returning home, he had observed that the equality of condition, though it had not yet attained there the "extreme limit" that it seemed to have attained in the United States, was nevertheless approaching it, and that the democracy that governed the American communities was rapidly rising to power in Europe. It should be remarked that Tocqueville did not feel that this was in every way a desirable change, but he emphasized nevertheless that America could



Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Mass.

"Historical Monument of the American Republic"; oil painting by Erastus Salisbury Field, c. 1876

serve for Europeans as a kind of prophecy of their own future.

A somewhat different point was made by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1936. "Long before I returned to Washington as President of the United States, I had made up my mind," he said, "that, pending what might be called a more opportune moment on other continents, the United States could best serve the cause of a peaceful humanity by setting an example." This, he explained, was why he had declared in March 1933: "In the field of world policy I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor — the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others — the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors."

Others have based their affirmation of the exemplary character of American beliefs and institutions on still other grounds — on the grounds of the country's economic system, of its support of economic as well as civil rights, even of its arts. [For further discussion of some of the matters treated here, see Chs. 3: CONSTITUTIONALISM and 9: EQUALITY.]

But throughout our history the grounds most often mentioned have probably been political. It is the way we made our government, and the kind of government it was and is, that is the most important example to the world. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow put it as memorably as anyone, perhaps, in his poem "The Building of the Ship." It was read to a large audience in Boston by Fanny Kemble, on February 12, 1850 — she "standing out upon the platform, book in hand, trembling, palpitating, and weeping, and giving every word its true weight and emphasis." The audience was stirred to its depths by "the impassioned burst with which the poem closes, and which fell upon no listless ears in the deep agitation of the year 1850" — the year of the famous Compromise, which was being

debated in the Congress at that moment, and which was thought during the spring of 1850 to be the salvation of the Union.

The poem's close has survived the Compromise itself, which endured less than a decade.

Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State!
Sail on, O Union, strong and great!
Humanity with all its fears,
With all the hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!
We know what Master laid thy keel,
What Workmen wrought thy ribs of steel,
Who made each mast, and sail, and rope,
What anvils rang, what hammers beat,
In what a forge and what a heat
Were shaped the anchors of thy hope!
Fear not each sudden sound and shock,
'Tis of the wave and not the rock;
'Tis but the flapping of the sail,
And not a rent made by the gale!
In spite of rock and tempest's roar,
In spite of false lights on the shore,
Sail on, nor fear to breast the sea!
Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee,
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,
Are all with thee — are all with thee!

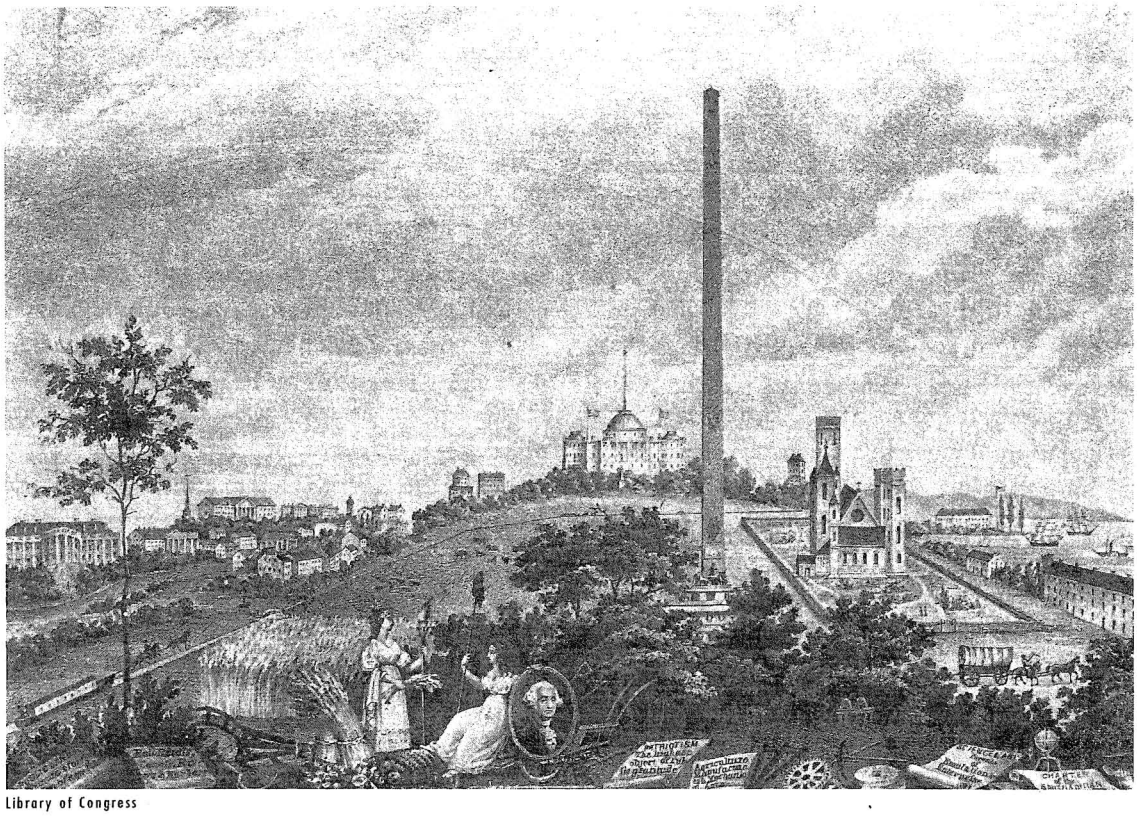
2. THE UNIQUENESS OF AMERICA

AMERICA'S GREAT MISSION and high destiny have been said by its citizens to derive not only from the quality of its institutions and beliefs but from the special character of its human and natural resources — in a word, from its uniqueness. The notion that America is unique would indeed seem to be a natural concomitant of the notion that the nation has a special role to play on the world's stage.

Many writers have pointed to the abundance of our wealth, both that we found and that we have made. Capt. John Smith was already proclaiming the fertility of the soil and the variety of the flora and fauna in 1616. He was not the last to do so. "The lands exceed description," wrote Rev. James Smith of the country northwest of the Ohio River in 1797. "Suffice it to say that the soil is amazingly rich . . . as level as a bowling plain and vastly extensive. . . . A country so famous for grass must of course be excellent for all kinds of stock. Here I saw the finest beef and mutton that I ever saw, fed on grass. Hogs also increase and fatten in the woods in a most surprising manner. . . . The rivers produce an infinite number of fish."

Smith's amazement was echoed by Thoreau, a half century later. "Where on the globe can there be found an area of equal extent with that occupied by the bulk of our states," he asked in 1851, "so fertile and so rich and varied in its productions, and at the same time so habitable by the European, as this is?" And we do not cease to be astounded by, and to express our gratitude for, the riches in and beneath our soil.

By the early 1880s, it was not only the native riches of the land but also what we had made of them that astonished both natives and visitors alike. Henry Clay, speaking in 1830 of what he called "The American System," declared that its great object was to secure the independence of the country, to augment its wealth, and to diffuse the comforts of civilization throughout society. "It is a system which develops, improves, and perfects the capabilities of our common country and enables us to avail ourselves of all the resources with which Providence has blessed us." Moreover, he said, "the system has had a wonderful success. It has more than realized all the hopes of its founders. It has completely falsified all the predictions of its opponents." And President Lyndon B. Johnson was saying almost the same thing when he declared, in a



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"Elements of National Thrift and Empire"; lithograph from a drawing by J. G. Bruff, 1847

speech delivered at the University of Michigan on May 22, 1964, that in our time "we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society but upward to the Great Society. The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all."

Indeed, the notion that it was abundance rather than political ideals that America had to offer to the world was expressed by the historian David M. Potter in 1954. We have been historically correct in supposing that we had a revolutionary message to offer, he wrote, but we have been mistaken in our concept of what that message was. "We supposed that our revelation was 'democracy revolutionizing the world,' but in reality it was 'abundance revolutionizing the world' — a message which we did not preach and scarcely understood ourselves, but one which was peculiarly able to preach its own gospel without words."

The critic John Kouwenhoven saw the same thing from a different point of view. For a century and a half, he said in 1948, critics of American culture had been applying European criteria of value "to the products of a civilization which has had less and less in common with that which produced the forms and techniques from which those criteria were deduced." In fact, he declared, America was the product of those forces which throughout the world were creating "technological civilization." At most this civilization was 200 years old, he declared, "and there has never before been any order comparable to it."

Others have pointed to traits of character, and to habits of industry and thrift, as constituting our uniqueness. The distinguished Philadelphian Charles J. Ingersoll declared in 1810 that "the number of persons devoted to pious exercises, from reflection, independent of education and habit, is greater in

the United States than in any other part of the world, in proportion to the population; and religious morality is more general and purer here than elsewhere." He lauded our civil institutions, which, he said, conduced equally with religious toleration to habits of intelligence and independence, and declared that "for plain rudimental learning, and general, practical good sense, the Americans surpass all other people." Edward Everett proclaimed us to be, in 1824, "the most substantial, uncorrupted, and intelligent population on earth." In his poems, Walt Whitman sang what he called "that new moral American continent without which, I see, the physical continent remained incomplete, maybe a carcass, a bloat — that newer America, answering face to face with The States, with ever-satisfying and ever-unsurveyable seas and shores."

George Santayana spoke in 1920 of "a fund of vigor, goodness, and hope such as no nation ever possessed before." F. Scott Fitzgerald, trying in a letter to his daughter to describe the essence of America, suggested that, after all was said and done, it was "a willingness of the heart." And Stephen Vincent Benét, in a poem called "Nightmare at Noon," conceded his country's faults:

> Oh yes, I know the faults and the other side,
> The lyncher's rope, the bought justice, the wasted land,
> The scale on the leaf, the borers in the corn,
> The finks with their clubs, the grey sky of relief,
> All the long shame of our hearts and the long disunion.

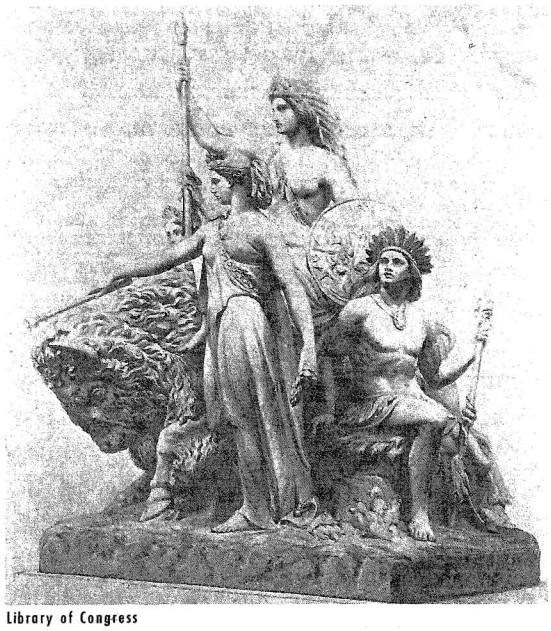
But he added: "I am merely remarking — as a country, we try. / As a country, I think we try." [For some dissenting views, see the last section, below; and see also Ch. 1: National Character, for a more fully developed treatment of America's characteristics as a people and as a nation.]

3. AMERICA AS AN ASYLUM FOR THE WORLD

Given, then, in some sense, our exemplary existence, our uniqueness, not only in abundance and moral character but also in our political inventions and institutions — if these things can be "given" at all — the question, for many Americans, has been: What shall we do with all these riches? Patently so profoundly blessed, what do we owe in return — to the Lord who blessed us, and to the world that knows He did?

The answer of men like Winthrop and Bulkeley was implicit in their affirmation of our uniqueness. The city set on a hill cannot be hidden; it must succeed or bring obloquy not only upon itself but also upon its Maker. But they were not alone in holding that America's first and highest obligation was to itself. It is an old saying that he who would do good must first do well.

"While [Europe] is laboring to become the domicile of despotism," wrote Jefferson in 1823 to President James Monroe, "our endeavor should surely be to make our hemisphere that of freedom." (Jefferson in 1801 had warned against "entangling alliances" of any kind.) Senator Henry Cabot Lodge put it this way, in 1919, in a speech opposing U.S. participation in the League of Nations: "I am as anxious as any human being can be to have the United States render every possible service to the civilization and the peace of mankind, but I am certain we can do it best by not putting ourselves in leading strings or subjecting our policies and our sovereignty to other nations. The independence of the United States is not only more precious to ourselves but to the world than any single possession." Leave America free, he urged his fellow senators, lest you "destroy her power for good and



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"America"; by Gebbie and Barrie for the United States International Exhibition, 1875

endanger her very existence. Leave her to march freely through the centuries to come as in the years that have gone. Strong, generous, and confident, she has nobly served mankind."

Others have held that while America should not entangle itself in the broils of other nations, it should throw open its doors to all men and be, as Jefferson put it, "an asylum for all mankind." Throughout most of our history, we have welcomed the oppressed and persecuted, giving them homes and jobs and paying relatively little attention to their opinions, opinions for which they might have been driven from their native countries. America was an asylum from the beginning; in fact, the first English settlers were fleeing from religious persecution. Throughout the seventeenth century and much of the eighteenth, Quakers came to escape persecution; and Catholics came in large numbers after the Revolution in England in 1688. Victims of the French Revolution were welcomed in America all through the Napoleonic Wars. The turmoil in Europe following the revolutions of 1848 produced another large influx of political refugees, and once more they found a welcome. Before that, the terrible Irish famine of 1846 had created another kind of refugee, who also found homes and jobs in America's cities and plains.

During the latter part of the century a large number of Jews came from Poland and Russia, not only, or simply, because America was the land of opportunity but also because conditions in their native lands had become intolerable for them (anti-Semitism was not invented by Hitler). The United States welcomed more refugees during and after World War I, and then again during and after World War II. Between 1940 and 1945 many thousands of victims of the Nazi and Fascist tyrannies in Germany and Italy came to New York and other U.S. cities, and many more thousands came after the war, following months or years spent in various way stations — in the West Indies, in South America, in Mexico. Indeed, there has been a more or less steady flow of refugees, both from political and religious persecution and from natural disasters, into the country for more than 300 years. And since World War II the United States has been markedly generous in offering political asylum to those who were fleeing from one or another kind of Communist tyranny. Lately, we may have inquired more carefully than we used to into the political opinions of those who requested our aid, but the principle, by and large, has been the same.

This is true even though, during the last century or so, and particularly during the period from about 1880 to about 1920, the principle was not applied with the universality that Jefferson, for one, might have wished. Particularly around 1900 the desire to exclude at least some immigrants rather than welcome all seemed to be dominant in American thought.

A change in the nation's heart may be seen in a few scattered examples. "Foreign immigration," the Republican National Platform declared in 1864, "which in the past has added so much to the wealth, development of resources, and increase of power to the nation — the asylum of the oppressed of all nations — should be fostered and encouraged by a liberal and just policy." But only twenty years later President Grover Cleveland could say to Congress that "the admitted right of a government to prevent the influx of elements hostile to its internal peace and safety may not be questioned, even where there is no treaty stipulation on the subject." And the Democratic National Platform for 1892 could declare that "we heartily approve all legitimate efforts to prevent the United States from being used as the dumping ground for the known criminals and professional paupers of Europe."

The difference between the Democratic statements of the 1880s and 1890s and the Republican statements of the 1860s is largely ascribable to differing goals and interests of the two parties and to important changes in the economic situation. But the later statements nevertheless reflect a shift in national feelings, which was also reflected in "gentlemen's agreements" and in legislation excluding some peoples entirely, and subjecting the admittance of others to a quota system that endured, for all intents and purposes, until the 1960s.

In spite of that, however, as we have pointed out above, the United States remained an asylum for much of mankind, even during the period of strongest anti-immigrant sentiment. And a long list of declarations by newcomers to our land could be assembled, declarations that would reveal the conception held by foreigners who looked to us as a refuge from both poverty and injustice. Carl Schurz, for example, told his adopted countrymen in 1859 how his "childish imagination [had taken] possession of a land covered partly with majestic trees, partly with flowery prairies, immeasurable to the eye, and intersected with large rivers and broad lakes — a land where everybody could do what he thought best, and where nobody need be poor, because everybody was free." These visions, though not exact, he said, were not untrue. And he went on to speak of Americanism as the great representative of the reformatory age, as the great champion of the dignity of human nature, as the great repository of the last hopes of suffering mankind.

Mary Antin was another, like Schurz, who came to America and saw her dreams come true. Writing in 1914, she urged her compatriots to continue following the policy that had enabled her, as a little child from a poor country, to share in the riches, both material and spiritual, of America, and urged, too, that they consider long and well any discriminatory anti-immigrants laws. "Mount guard in the name of the republic if the health of the republic requires it," she said, "but let no such order be issued until her statesmen and philosophers and patriots have consulted together. . . . For those who are excluded when our bars are down are exiles from Egypt, whose feet stumble in the desert of political and social slavery, whose hearts hunger for the bread of freedom. The ghost of the *Mayflower* pilots every immigrant ship, and Ellis Island is another name for Plymouth Rock."

The Statue of Liberty, of course, was and still remains the symbol of the nation to the world. In one of his sketches, William Sidney Porter ("O. Henry") allowed "The Lady Higher Up" to speak her piece and to express her meaning for other peoples — her intention of resolving national differences and making, as our country's motto declares, "Out of Many, One." "I was made by a Dago," the Lady says in O. Henry's story, "and presented to the American people on behalf of the French Government for the purpose of welcomin' Irish immigrants into the Dutch city of New York." And Emma Lazarus also spoke in

The Corcoran Gallery of Art

"In the Land of Promise: Castle Garden" by C. F. Ulrich, 1884

the Lady's behalf when she wrote the poem, "The New Colossus," which is inscribed on the base of the statue in New York Harbor. The words are as well known as any ever written by an American poet:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

Symbols, especially very well-known ones, can be dangerous; and in recent times the Statue of Liberty has taken on more ambiguous connotations than it once had. Foreign cartoonists nowadays still use the Lady to stand for the United States, but like as not they put a different face on her; instead of the smiling and welcoming one that we know, she will have an angry face, or one that is withered and old, or one that threatens and seems to repel instead of attract. Sometimes the picture makes clear that the Lady's torch has gone out; sometimes she holds, in her outstretched arm, a bundle of weapons, or even a bundle of snakes, rather than the light of liberty that we also know.

Such caricatures are doubtless half a century old; we have had trouble explaining for at least that long why it is no longer possible for everyone who wants to to come. Nevertheless, those who *are* able to come, probably still come for the same reasons as they always did. [For further discussion of America's attitudes and policies toward immigrants, see Ch. 12: MINORITIES.]

4. MANIFEST DESTINY: AMERICA AND THE REGENERATION OF MANKIND

FOUR PROPOSITIONS may sum up our examination so far of the American destiny as

Americans have understood it.

1. America is uniquely blessed, both in its natural and in its human resources.

2. Partly as a result of that, and partly as a result of an accident of history, America leads the world in establishing a society based on justice and equality.

3. America, then, is in some sense the surrogate for all mankind in defining, and making concrete in institutions, the meaning of human freedom.

4. As an aspect of these three, America is a haven or refuge for the oppressed of the world.

We have noted in addition that, in the view of many writers, America could best fulfill its high destiny by abstaining from interference in the affairs of other nations, by doing well at home rather than doing good abroad — in short, by being an example to, but not an actual leader of, the world.

The position that America's destiny involves not only setting an example but also acting out a part, as it may be said, on the world's stage has been held by many other Americans. This conception is thought to have been given its name by a leading journalist of the Jacksonian period, John L. O'Sullivan, editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*. An unsigned editorial in the paper spoke of Manifest Destiny, a term that has had a tumultuous history in our national life. Indeed, Manifest Destiny, as opposed to destiny by itself, unqualified, has been a term of opprobrium more often than not.

When the term emerged, it had what some felt was an aggressive and expansionist tone, and no longer the implication of moral example that would redeem the world by its light. Many historians assert, as well, that the change that occurred in the 1830s marked a shift from a universalistic tone to a particularistic, even nationalistic, one. The rest of the world was lost, writers began to hint, and America must save it, even if it meant absorbing it, even if it meant defeating it in war. It may also be true, as some

Winterthur Museum

Carved wooden eagle from Baltimore, Md.

have suggested, that the apparent inconsistency of the two notions of "mission" and "example," both of which are implicit in the idea of Manifest Destiny, continues to trouble our foreign policy to this day. For if, as we say, we are the ark of liberty, then must we not extend a helping hand to all the oppressed peoples of the earth? But can we do that without at the same time denying to them the freedom and independence for which *we* stand?

These questions, and others of the same sort, have troubled some Americans for more than a century but have come to the fore mainly in the modern period. During the nineteenth century Manifest Destiny was a successful political slogan, and sometimes even a battle cry.

In the view of O'Sullivan, the mission of America to establish freedom and justice not only at home but also throughout the world derived ultimately from the fact, as he and others of his time saw it, that this was the most progressive of all nations, and that its career both aided in and was an aspect of what he called the perfectibility or regeneration of man.

"The history of humanity is the record of a grand march," O'Sullivan wrote in 1839,

"more or less rapid, as it was now impeded by obstacles, and again facilitated by force, at all times tending to one point — the ultimate perfection of man. The course of civilization is the progress of man from a state of savage individualism to that of an individualism more elevated, moral, and refined. . . . The last order of civilization, which is the democratic, received its first permanent existence in this country."

In another piece written the same year, O'Sullivan was making the point even more strongly. "We may confidently assume," he wrote, "that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity. . . . Yes," he added, "we are the nation of progress, of individual freedom, of universal enfranchisement. . . . We must onward to the fulfillment of our mission — to the entire development of the principle of our organization — freedom of conscience, freedom of person, freedom of trade and business pursuits, universality of freedom and equality. This is our high destiny, and in nature's eternal, inevitable decree of cause and effect we must accomplish it. . . . [America's] high example shall smite unto death the tyranny of kings, hierarchs, and oligarchs and carry the glad tidings of peace and goodwill where myriads now endure an existence scarcely more enviable than that of beasts of the field. Who, then, can doubt that our country is destined to be *the great nation* of futurity?"

This kind of talk, by no means confined to O'Sullivan, continued through (and was one of the causes of) the Mexican War. Ten years after that war ended, the talk was still going on. An editorial in O'Sullivan's paper in May 1858 made the point more explicitly than ever. "Among the regenerating political powers of the world," it said, "the United States hold today the complete precedence. We, of all the nations, can show a history and example of progress, order, and power, without monarchy or hierarchy, which can impart emphasis and conviction to the theoretical lessons and preachings of

The Smithsonian Institution
"Memorial to Lincoln"; lithograph, 1865

freedom. . . . Our nation has grown till it can measure its strength with the mightiest powers of the earth; and the question now comes up, Shall we not begin as a republic, to emancipate nations, as monarchies have long been crushing republics?"

The editorial advocated the conquest of Mexico, an event that might possibly have occurred if it had not been for the outbreak of the Civil War. That conflict, and the period of national adjustment and consolidation that followed, had the effect of quieting somewhat the talk of Manifest Destiny. But the talk broke out again at the end of the century, one result, or perhaps concomitant, of it being the Spanish-American War. The success of this, America's only truly imperial endeavor, fed fuel to the rhetorical fire. At the close of the century, Senator Albert J. Beveridge became the spokesman of the portion of the electorate that held that America's true mission of democ-

racy could not be accomplished in peace and isolation.

In a speech to the Senate, on January 9, 1900, the fiery young senator from Indiana addressed his colleagues on a variety of subjects. He urged the annexation of the Philippines, arguing not only that annexation would greatly increase our wealth but also that "the Filipinos are children, utterly incapable of self-government." It is the last point, indeed, that was the heart of his position. And he went on to say that the Philippines were only the first among the many underdeveloped countries of the world — as we would call them now — that America would have to assimilate benevolently in the epoch that was just beginning.

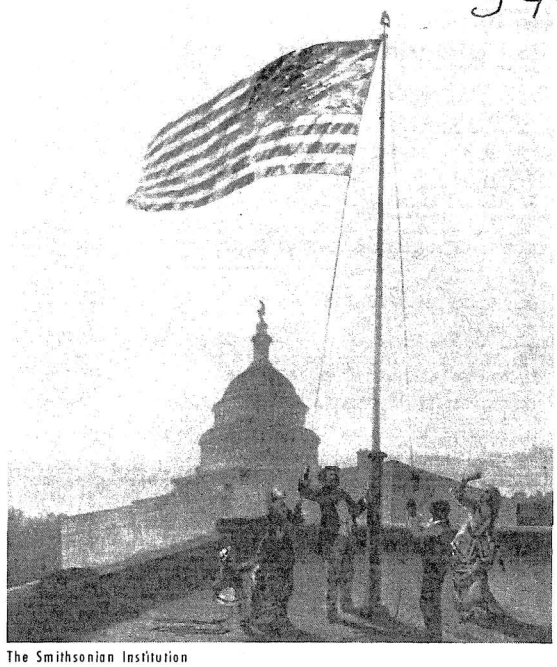
"Self-government and internal development have been the dominant notes of our first century," Beveridge declared; "administration and the development of other lands will be the dominant notes of our second century. And administration is as high and holy a function as self-government, just as the care of a trust estate is as sacred an obligation as the management of our own concerns. Cain was the first to violate the divine law of human society which makes of us our brother's keeper. And administration of good government is the first lesson in self-government, that exalted estate toward which all civilization tends."

God had made the Anglo-Saxon adepts in government, Beveridge said, in order that they might administer government among "savage and senile peoples." Were it not for such a force as this, he suggested, the world would relapse into barbarism and night. And, he added: "Of all our race He has marked the American people as His chosen nation to finally lead in the regeneration of the world. This is the divine mission of America, and it holds for us all the profit, all the glory, all the happiness possible to man."

The careless modern reader might take Beveridge as merely saying what politicians still often say — namely, that America's spiritual and moral force give it a right as well as a responsibility to influence, if not control, the destinies of other peoples. In fact, however, this speech as well as others had undertones of racism that would now be thought ugly. Beveridge was a Progressive and a supporter of President Theodore Roosevelt, and as such what might be called a "liberal"; but he shared the prejudice against all races except the Anglo-Saxon that was so common among his Progressive contemporaries.

Racism, indeed, was commonplace, not only among politicians but also among social scientists and particularly anthropologists. John Fiske, James Ford Rhodes, and John W. Burgess were but three among a host of historians and advocates of "social evolution" who attempted to justify their racist beliefs with complicated theories having the aura of "science." Racism in anthropology, in fact, remained dominant for a generation, until its scientific underpinnings, if not its emotional overtones, were destroyed by Franz Boas in a series of books published during and after World War I. Racism endured in the discriminatory immigration laws passed in the 1920s, but on the whole it died out in American political oratory. It bore terrible fruit, however, in Hitler's Germany during the 1930s and 1940s.

Beveridge's view of America's mission, shorn of its ugliness and also of its explicitly imperialistic tone, has found expression in the present century, particularly in the years since World War II. The Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the Eisenhower Doctrine were policies and programs in the 1940s and 1950s that were based on the notion that the United States must aid others, not only in their material need but also in their search for freedom. And our involvements in both Korea and Vietnam were defended on the grounds that it was our obligation as the leading free power on earth to support the efforts of weaker peoples to attain their own independence from their neighbors.



The Smithsonian Institution

"The Flag That Has Waved 100 Years"; J. M. Munyon

Sometimes, as for example during the Hungarian uprising of 1956, we have not intervened when the world expected that we would. Perhaps sheer necessity demanded that we abstain on that occasion — but our failure gave considerable moral force to President Kennedy's demand, in the fall of 1963, that the Soviet Union abstain from arming Castro's Cuba. Whatever the reasons, there has been no lack of Americans who have opposed the notion of Manifest Destiny in this century. And the strain of isolationism in foreign policy persists to the present day.

One would not call the essayist E. B. White an isolationist, but he has often given expression to the view that is most sharply opposed to Manifest Destiny — the position, a restatement of an earlier one, that America, in order to fulfill its destiny, must refrain from interfering in the affairs of others, even if such interference should seem to be for the sake of peace and justice on earth. "Do not try to save the world by loving thy neighbor," he wrote in 1946; "it will only make him nervous. Save the world by respecting thy neighbor's rights under law and insisting that he respect yours (under the same law)."

President Eisenhower, in his First Inaugural Address, in 1953, made the point in a somewhat different, and an even older, way. "Whatever America hopes to bring to pass in this world," he said, "must first come to pass in the heart of America." President Kennedy was reaffirming the same notion when he urged us, as he often did, to build the good society at home before thinking we could have our will everywhere, or anywhere, in the world. And Abraham Lincoln was making essentially the same point when, in the Gettysburg Address, he tried to clarify the meaning of the great conflict that was the subject of this most celebrated of all American speeches. The Civil War was being fought, Lincoln said, not to save America or to promulgate Americanism, but to ensure that government of the people, by the people, and for the people should not perish from the earth. [For further discussion of many points that are merely touched on here, see Ch. 8: FOREIGN POLICY.]

5. THE PROMISE OF AMERICA — HAS IT BEEN FULFILLED?

SOME OF THE PRECEDING SECTIONS of this chapter may have seemed to be all or mostly one way. It is true enough that so far we have emphasized the positive aspect, as it may be called, of America's destiny. But a high destiny, while a great glory, is also a great responsibility and a heavy burden.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the pregnant questions — Has the promise of America been fulfilled? Has its destiny yet been, or can it ever be, accomplished? — have engaged the anguished attention of many Americans for more than a century. As those who are conversant with our history know, we ourselves are our severest critics, and Americans have been unsparing of their criticism on scores of occasions in both the past and the present. Only a few such occasions can be discussed here; but

Courtesy, C. D. Batchelor, New York "Daily News," 1961

they are ones that have given rise to persistent strains of questioning and doubt.

Mention was made in the preceding section of the vigorous objections to expansionist ventures such as the Mexican War and the Spanish-American War, and to our involvement in Korea and Vietnam. "Did this country know itself, or were it disposed to profit by self-knowledge," William Ellery Channing warned in 1837, "it would feel the necessity of laying an immediate curb on its passion for extended territory. It would not trust itself to new acquisitions. It would shrink from the temptation to conquest. We are a restless people," he added, "prone to encroachment, impatient of the ordinary laws of progress, less anxious to consolidate and perfect than to extend our institutions, more ambitious of spreading ourselves over a wide space than of diffusing beauty and fruitfulness over a narrower field."

The same impatience was pointed to by Senator Alexander Wiley of Wisconsin in the years after World War II, although he did not charge us with the greed for territory that Channing feared. "We always want to see within a few years revolutionary results which take generations to come about," Wiley told the Italian journalist Luigi Barzini, Jr. "You see, we're good-hearted people, we're good people, accustomed to miracles in our own country, and we can't bear to see others suffer. . . . You can't do the same abroad, apparently. We always want to do too much for too many people and too quickly."

More lately still, President Johnson and those who supported his policy in Vietnam were charged with a similar, if not the same, impatience. Some went as far as to say, as Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas did in the spring of 1966, that the Johnson policies reflected a kind of "arrogance of power" rather than essential good-heartedness. The President replied to the charge in terms that are familiar to one who knows our history. No, he said, it was not the arrogance of power, but rather the obligation of power. And so the old argument goes on, as it doubtless will in the years to come.

Not so much the greed for territory as the simpler, and perhaps more basic, greed for money has been criticized since the early days of the republic. A number of such criticisms are discussed in Chs. 15: Freedom of Enterprise and 16: Corporation. Here it suffices to mention one or two examples of this point of view.

Count Adam de Gurowski, a Polish nobleman who visited the United States in the 1850s, was perhaps more perceptive on the point than most. He observed that "the great reproach made by Europeans to the Americans, and one which has become proverbial among themselves, is the excessive love of money, the fact that they are a moneymaking people. Undoubtedly money-making has eaten itself deep into the American character," he conceded, but he went on to observe that the love of money was by no means confined to America, and that it "has been and is now the most deeply rooted passion in human nature." This was to suggest, perhaps, that the Americans

were more human than other human beings; even so, it was not, nor was it intended as, a compliment, and the words, however softened by concessions of the universal nature of our traits, were far from affirming the devotion and dedication to ideals that are the traditional constituents of our high destiny.

A not dissimilar view was expressed by the crusading journalist Lincoln Steffens, in 1904. "We Americans may have failed," he wrote. "We may be mercenary and selfish. Democracy with us may be impossible and corruption inevitable." But he went on to say that the "muckraking" articles collected in his book *The Shame of the Cities* "have demonstrated beyond doubt that we can stand the truth. . . . So this little volume, a record of shame and yet of self-respect, a disgraceful confession, yet a declaration of honor, is dedicated, in all good faith, to the accused — to all the citizens of all the cities in the United States."

Of greater and more lasting import is the charge that although we *declare* that all Americans are equal and free, we do not *treat* all equally, and some *are not* free. In this view, slavery is the blackest mark on our escutcheon — and one, indeed, that may in some profound sense be ineradicable.

William Lloyd Garrison, the most militant of the militant Abolitionists of the last century, came close to making the latter charge. "The claims of the slaves for redress are as strong as those of any Americans could be in a similar position," he wrote in 1829. "Does any man deny the position? The proof, then, is found in the fact that a very large proportion of our colored population were born on our soil and are therefore entitled to all the privileges of American citizens. This is their country by birth, not adoption. Their children possess the same inherent and inalienable rights as ours; and it is a crime of the blackest dye to load them with fetters."

In a speech at Peoria, Illinois, in 1854, Lincoln, not yet a national figure, made clear his deepest feelings on the subject. He spoke of "the monstrous injustice of slavery," declaring that "I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world; enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites; causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity; and especially because it forces so many good men among ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty, criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting that there is no right principle of action but self-interest."

Emerson condemned the Fugitive Slave Law, which required that Northerners aid slaveholders in recapturing their human property, in equally strong terms in the same year. "The way in which the country was dragged to consent to this [law], and the disastrous defection (on the miserable cry of Union) of the men of letters, of the colleges, of educated men, nay, of some preachers of religion, was the darkest passage in [our] history. . . . It showed that the old religion and the sense of the right had faded and gone out; that while we reckoned ourselves a highly cultivated nation, our bellies had run away with our brains, and the principles of culture and progress did not exist."

In the view of many Americans, both then and now, slavery was an offense, not only to man but also to God. This was the purport of the famous lines in Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic":

> Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
> He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
> He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword;
> His truth is marching on.

And Lincoln expressed the same view in his Second Inaugural Address. "The Almighty

has His own purposes," he said. " 'Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.' If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the Providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always attribute to Him? Fondly do we hope — fervently do we pray — that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's 250 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said 3,000 years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' "

These views did not cease to be expressed in the years after the Civil War. A hundred years after Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., still found it necessary to say that history had thrown upon our generation an indescribably important destiny — to complete a process of democratization that our nation had too long developed too slowly, but that was our most powerful weapon for world respect and emulation. "The future of America is bound up with the solution of the present crisis [in civil rights]," he declared. "The shape of the world today does not permit us the luxury of a faltering democracy. The United States cannot hope to attain the respect of the vital and growing colored nations of the world unless it remedies its racial problems at home. If America is to remain a first-class nation, it cannot have a second-class citizenship." And of course many similar statements have been heard in the years that have passed since those remarks were made, in 1958.

The denial of civil rights to Negroes has not been the only occasion for such charges. Henry M. Brackenridge castigated the "Maryland Jew Bill" in 1819 — a law that denied Jews the rights enjoyed by other citizens of the state — and in so doing reaffirmed a traditional conception of America's destiny. "If I were required to assign a reason why, in the course of events," he said, "it was permitted by Providence that this continent should become known to Europe, the first, and most striking, according to my understanding, would be that it was the will of heaven to open here an asylum to the persecuted of every nation!" But, he went on to say, the denial of their constitutional rights to Jews went against everything that the country stood for, and could not be condoned. Others, criticizing our exclusionist immigration policies at the turn of the century, made the same point.

It was made once again by Justice Frank Murphy in 1944, in his dissenting opinion in *Korematsu* v. *U.S.* — a case involving the denial of rights to citizens of Japanese descent in California during World War II. "I dissent . . . from this legalization of racism," he said. "Racial discrimination in any form and in any degree has no justifiable part whatever in our democratic way of life. It is unattractive in any setting but it is utterly revolting among a free people who have embraced the principles set forth in the Constitution of the United States. All residents of this nation are kin in some way by blood or culture to a foreign land. Yet they are primarily and necessarily a part of the new and distinct civilization of the United States. They must accordingly be treated at all times as the heirs of the American experiment."

And the unequal treatment of women has also been cited, for at least a century, as a sign of the unwillingness of America to apply the principles on which it claims to stand.

Less specific changes, but no less severe for that, have been leveled at America by modern writers who have sensed what they felt was a general failure on our part to live up to our promises. F. Scott Fitzgerald spoke, in an undated letter — probably written around 1925 — of a sense shared, as he put it, by every generation since the Civil War — a sense "of being somehow about to inherit the earth." This consummate conceit and selfishness, he went on to say, had to be paid for, and *was* paid for by all Americans in their later years. "You've heard me say before," he wrote to his unknown correspondent, "that I think the faces of most American women over thirty are relief maps of petulant and bewildered unhappiness." Nor, as he made clear, were the men any better. Sherwood Anderson agreed on the last point. "Suppose, I suggested to myself," he wrote in one of the stories in *Winesburg, Ohio,* "that the giving of itself by an entire generation to mechanical things was really making all men impotent."

The Englishman D. H. Lawrence made much the same point — in an influential book that many Americans read and quoted a generation ago. "Your heaps of gold are only so many muck-heaps, America, and will remain so till you become a reality to yourselves," he wrote in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1922). "All this Americanizing and mechanizing has been for the sake of overthrowing the past. And now look at America, tangled in her own barbed wire and mastered by her own machines. Absolutely got down by her own barbed wire of shalt-nots, and shut up fast in her own 'productive' machines like millions of squirrels running in millions of cages. It is just a farce." Lawrence, indeed, in a poem written at about the same time, made a bitter twentieth-century British comment on a famous eighteenth-century British poetical conceit. Bishop George Berkeley had written 200 years before, in a poem titled "On the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America" (the lines are known to every American schoolchild):

> Westward the course of empire takes its way;
> The first four acts already past,
> A fifth shall close the drama with the day:
> Time's noblest offspring is the last.

Lawrence, without making explicit mention of Berkeley, turned the metaphor from an optimistic assertion into a gloomy question.

> Oh, America, the sun sets in you.
> Are you the grave of our day?

A number of American poets in the twentieth century also asked searching questions about our destiny, and, like Lawrence, found it difficult if not impossible to give comforting answers. In "Shine, Perishing Republic," Robinson Jeffers wrote:

> While this America settles in the mould of its vulgarity, heavily thickening to empire,
> And protest, only a bubble in the molten mass, pops and sighs out, and the mass hardens,
> I sadly smiling remember that the flower fades to make fruit, the fruit rots to make earth. . . .

He went on to address his sons, and all men's sons in America:

> And boys, be in nothing so moderate as in love of man, a clever servant, insufferable master.
> There is the trap that catches noblest spirits, that caught — they say — God, when he walked the earth.

Such writings were typical of the 1920s. The 1940s and 1950s, the so-called McCarthy Era, saw other writings that questioned

the devotion of America to its own ideals. Still another poet, Archibald MacLeish, was one of the most eloquent of the critics of those times. "An observant traveler might conclude," he wrote in 1954, "that the Americans were dying out. Like the moose in Newfoundland, which are reported to be perishing of some obscure psychological disorder — crashing half-blind into trees, mooning morosely around swamps, unable or unwilling even to rid themselves of their ticks.

"A generation ago the Americans were fairly common in this country. You could hear them blundering about in the bush at all hours, sniffing at everything, snorting at what they didn't care for, elbowing their way through any kind of trouble, respecting themselves and intending to be respected by others, cautious maybe but hard to intimidate and impossible to stampede. . . .

"American conservatives, back in those days, were men who believed in conserving America, including the American Constitution, including also the American Bill of Rights, regardless of the opposition. . . . American liberals were men who believed in the achievement of the American Revolution no matter who was against it. And neither side ran in packs. And neither side was herded by fear or by anything else. Where they have gone to now, and why, is the great American mystery. With the moose it is said to be the climate."

MacLeish was inveighing, of course, against what seems in retrospect to have been the worst characteristic of the McCarthy Era — the silence of the times, the fear that so many felt about speaking out. But others beside MacLeish *did* speak out — men like Senators William Benton of Connecticut and Ralph Flanders of Vermont, historians like Henry Steele Commager and Bernard DeVoto, educators like Alexander Meiklejohn, public servants like David E. Lilienthal, to say nothing of men like Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, industrialist Clarence Randall, pundit Walter Lippmann, churchman John A. MacKay. Perhaps, indeed, it was mainly the poets and the priests — people who, though they receive little honor for it in this or any civilization, are always among those whom we depend on to put us right when we are wrong — who continued to speak out; and in the end McCarthyism in its most repressive aspects did not prevail, but rather failed, not only in the condemnation by the Senate of McCarthy himself but also more generally, in a widespread relaxation of restrictions on dissent.

The criticism did not end with the demise of McCarthyism. Instead, it seemed to grow ever more sharp, incisive. Kennedy came in in 1961 on the wings of promises reiterated with considerable eloquence and effect. It is true enough that in his Inaugural Address Kennedy challenged the American people to do better than they had, and that many times in his campaign he pointed out earlier failures to come up to expectations. But implicit in his program was the notion of new frontiers, and when almost the first action of his administration was the Bay of Pigs fiasco in Cuba, there were many who began to question the validity and genuineness of his statements on other matters. Was this the new way in foreign and domestic policy that had been promised? Or was this only more of the same old ineffectual scramble both at home and abroad?

It tends to be overlooked now, with the almost universal adoration that developed following Kennedy's death, that in fact this young, handsome President was the subject of severe criticism both from the right and the left — from businessmen, who thought he was putting a brake on the industrial and commercial expansion of the country, and from intellectuals, who feared that his elegance and style were only a mask for a steel-hard political ambition. And the ringing phrases of Kennedy's inaugural did not

Library of Congress

"American Progress"; 1873 lithograph from a painting by John Gast, 1872

entirely obliterate the warnings of Eisenhower's Farewell Address, delivered only a few days before. The outgoing chief executive, who, everyone felt, should know what he was talking about, spoke of a new and frightening "coalition" between the military and the great corporations that were engaged in "defense" work, a coalition, Eisenhower said, that threatened the very future of the country.

As the 1960s wore on, the Pentagon — "the most hideous institution on earth," according to MIT linguist Noam Chomsky — seemed to become more and more the symbol of America's broken promises. America, said Chomsky — echoing many others in the summer and fall of 1967 — was not only the most powerful nation in the world but also the most aggressive. If true, that was indeed a turnabout from what Americans had always claimed, and from what they had traditionally thought about themselves.

Many believed it was not true, of course; and even if they were not wholly right, either, it is incumbent on the historian to observe that any *one* thing is never true, in and by itself, about as large and complex a nation as the United States. In the late 1960s the country was deeply confused about itself, but it nevertheless continued to do — or try to do — the kinds of things it had always done. The problem of its Negro minority, for example, was baffling and frustrating; but it might be fair enough to point out what Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru is said to have pointed out to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles a decade before — that other countries had Negro minorities, too, but that the United States was the only one that was really trying to do something about it. Similarly, other nations in the past — imperial or quasi-imperial powers — had gotten themselves into the equivalents of Vietnam, but they had not sought so hard, once in the predicament, to come out of it justly, nor had they tried so hard to understand their

own role. "People call me an idealist," President Wilson once remarked. "Well, that is the way I know I am an American. America is the only idealist country in the world."

America was still an idealist country in the 1960s — but had the ideals changed? That was the question, and hardly anyone had the wisdom and the vision to answer it. The two poets Archibald MacLeish and Mark Van Doren wrestled with an answer in a series of conversations in the summer of 1962 — conversations part of which were televised that fall, and most of which were published two years later. In the course of two days of talk they kept coming back to a subject that seemed to fascinate them, that they seemed unable to let go. What was the American dream? What had it been, and what was it now? If it had changed, how had it changed — and why?

They said they loved their country and that one had to love it. They said it was one country, now, a hundred years after the Civil War, and that the breaking up of this whole was no longer a real possibility, was no longer conceivable in anybody's mind. Yet they wondered — at least MacLeish did — whether, "if the country is more firmly than ever before an economic, an industrial, a political whole, is it creatively *itself?* Does it have the kind of impulse it had at the time of the early settlers — that America is the beginning of the future, that the future *is* America?"

Van Doren said he thought it was still the same. But MacLeish would not let the matter rest there. Freedom, equality, the dignity of the individual — these had been the components of the old American dream, he said; but were they still? And as the conversation went on, they both began to realize that it was their very talk, their questioning, their attempt to come to grips with this difficult problem, that constituted, for them, the best that America had been and still could be. "I think we must still somehow or other continue to be able to assume that every man [is important]," Van Doren said. And he added: "I think what you and I are saying today we should say at the tops of our voices."

Freedom, then, was somehow to be of the essence of the dream. Freedom, said MacLeish in a kind of summing up, "means that a man is free of the constant attrition of other people's suspicion and denigration, and this achieved is what America is. And from that point of view, America is something worth any man's belief and any man's passionate loyalty!"

The criticism, in short, has not stopped; nor, it is to be hoped, will it stop in the future. Any society, and particularly one dedicated to the high ideals to which we have dedicated ourselves, needs critics to remind it that it is not always doing what it said it would do, to bring constantly before its awareness the principles on which it stands. In short, it needs questioners. These need not always be poets; anyone will do, if he is as eloquent as Grover Cleveland was in an address delivered in 1907.

"I indulge in no mere figure of speech," the ex-President declared, "when I say that our nation, the immortal spirit of our domain, lives in us — in our hearts and minds and consciences. There it must find its nutriment or die. This thought more than any other presents to our minds the impressiveness and responsibility of American citizenship. The land we live in seems to be strong and active. But how fares the land that lives in us?"

That the land that lives in us fares well is denied by some and affirmed by others. Every reader must decide for himself which is the case. But no one who truly understands the American destiny can doubt that the constant reiteration of Cleveland's question is of the essence of our way. For it is probably true that the American destiny will have utterly ceased to be attainable if the time ever comes when men say, flatly and without remaining doubt, that it has been attained.