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## Chapter 10

# PLURALISM IN AMERICAN SOCIETY AND POLITICS

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### INTRODUCTION

*E. Pluribus Unum.*

Motto of the United States of America

*I never use the word "nation" in speaking of the United States. I always use the word "union" or "confederacy." We are not a nation, but a union, a confederacy of equal and sovereign states.*

JOHN C. CALHOUN

*Praise what conforms and what is odd,  
Remembering, if the weather worsens  
Along the way, that even God  
Is said to be three separate Persons.  
Then upright or upon the knee,  
Praise Him that by His courtesy,  
For all our prejudice and pains,  
Diverse His creature still remains.*

PHYLLIS MCGINLEY

THE LATIN WORDS *E Pluribus Unum* ("out of many, one") appeared as a motto on the title page of the *Gentleman's Journal* in January 1692. On August 20, 1776, a committee composed of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson suggested that the phrase be used as the motto for the seal of the United States. It was adopted on June 20, 1782. The actual selection of the motto is sometimes credited to Pierre Eugene du Simitière, who submitted a design for the seal that was not accepted but that

contained the words. The phrase was engraved on certain denominations of coins in 1796 and now appears on all U.S. coins, a fact that has led to some bad jokes, such as that *E Pluribus Unum* is the most extensively coined phrase in American life.

In 1776 the motto bravely proclaimed what many feared could not be realized. Franklin the Pennsylvanian, Adams the Bostonian, and Jefferson the Virginian were particularly aware that if the loose confederation of states that had been declared united

and free on July 4 did not quickly find both an organic and an operational unity, it could not endure. Franklin put it with characteristic earthiness on the occasion of the signing of the Declaration. John Hancock had addressed the Continental Congress in these words: "It is too late to pull different ways; the members of the Continental Congress must hang together." "Yes, we must, indeed, all hang together," Franklin retorted, "or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately."

Unity in diversity has continued to be the American ideal up to the present day. But many have questioned, and still question, whether it has been achieved. Has political unity actually been created out of many states, and what is the proper allocation of state and federal powers? How large in area and population should "local" government units be, and what services should they perform? Is the United States as a whole moving in the direction of centralized government, and is centralization good or bad? Have parties, factions, lobbies, and pressure groups truly reflected the pluralistic character of the nation, and have they been beneficial or harmful to the common good?

In like manner, have the innumerable private voluntary associations that have been such a marked characteristic of our society made constructive contributions to American life? Has the "melting pot" really fused together the many nationalities and races that make up our population, or is this no more than a pious hope and a dream that can never come true? Was it after all wise to allow unrestricted immigration up to about 1920, or should checks have been imposed on immigration long before? When such checks were finally imposed, was this a fundamental betrayal of America's promise to the world?

Finally, what about diversity of opinion? Should America encourage and foster dissent or, failing that, should it at least permit

the questioning of its basic ideas and ideals? Or should the nation seek to achieve and maintain an intellectual, moral, and spiritual consensus? Is it desirable that everyone think in the same way, or does the very idea of democracy require that everyone think differently? Is compromise — political, economic, and social — of the essence of the American way? And if it is, is it still possible to maintain it in a world dominated by the mass media and by electronic and technological instruments of communication? In this respect, will the future be very different from the past? In short, can popular democracy any longer sustain, if it ever could, a plurality of subordinate governments, parties, factions, private associations, cultures, and opinions, and still survive in the modern world?

Alexis de Tocqueville pointed in 1835 to what he considered the threats posed by an equalitarian democracy to political and social pluralism. Anarchy would result, he observed, if every person, having been told that he was, and supposing himself to be, equal to every other, were to believe himself as good and as wise as everyone else and were therefore to continue to go his own way even after he had been outvoted by the majority. Or — what was more likely to happen, in Tocqueville's opinion — would pluralism and healthy individualism be stamped out by the tyranny of majority rule? There were some protections against the latter danger, he noted — the division of political power among competing authorities and jurisdictions, as well as the multitude of voluntary political, social, and religious associations — but he was not sure they would be sufficient.

James Fenimore Cooper warned during the same decade against the dangers inherent in the rule of the majority that might not truly represent all. "It is vain to boast of liberty if the ordinances of society are to receive the impression of sectarianism, or of

a provincial and narrow morality." Reiterating this theme early in the twentieth century, Herbert Croly called Americanism "collective irresponsibility," and decried "the moral and intellectual subordination of the individual to a commonplace popular average."

Such doubts, questions, criticisms have been repeated many times in the twentieth century. Especially during the 1920s and the 1950s — significantly, these were both postwar decades — many people were disturbed at the alleged pressures toward conformity that were becoming stronger and stronger. Nevertheless, even during these periods, writers could speak with eloquence of the persistent diversity in the country. Archibald MacLeish, for example, who was himself one of the doubters, could also write some very beautiful words in 1955 about the great variety to be found in America.

"The books are full of familiar and affectionate talk about the little lands: the countries made out of islands on the sea, or river valleys, or a circle of mountains. . . . You don't talk about continents that way. . . . The map of America goes on and on. The map of America is a map of endlessness, of opening out, of forever and ever."

America is big in time, too. "In the small countries the clocks strike all together — all one hour. With us it is still deep night at San Francisco, and dark still on the High Plains, and only barely gray on Lake Michigan, when the sun comes up at Marblehead. The same thing is true of the seasons. In the small countries the weather is all one weather more or less, but with us there are a thousand weathers and a choice of seasons. Beans will be out of the ground in Alabama when the snow is four feet deep in Minnesota and the garden around Charleston will be blooming when the oil burners at Kennebunkport are still blasting away. Some of us avoid the changes. . . .

But most of us stay put: we wouldn't quit the American changes if we could. Change and diversity are the meaning of our world: the American dimension. It is because the season changes, the weather changes, the country changes that the map goes on and on. What can change will never have an ending.

"America is a country of extremes. Those who think she should be all of a piece, all of a kind . . . every house like its neighbor and all minds alike, have never traveled on this continent. American wholeness, American singleness, American strength, is the wholeness, the singleness, the strength of many opposites made one. The Republic is a symbol of union because it is also a symbol of differences, and it will endure not because its deserts and seacoasts and forests and bayous and dead volcanoes are of one mind but because they are of several minds and are nevertheless together."

That puts it as well, perhaps, as anyone could. And it is what this chapter is about — the wholeness, singleness, and strength of many opposites made, or striving to be, one.

In any discussion of American pluralism, a distinction must be made between political pluralism, on the one hand, and social or cultural pluralism, on the other hand. Political pluralism, or federalism, is discussed first in the following, after which cultural pluralism — diversity of races and of ways of life — is treated.

#### 1. DUAL SOVEREIGNTY: THE FEDERAL UNION AND THE RIGHTS AND POWERS OF THE STATES

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, issued by "the thirteen United States of America" in 1776, assumed a plurality of sovereign states. It proclaimed that "these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be free

and independent states . . . and that, as free and independent states, they [should] have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do." The pronoun, it should be noted, was *they*, and the verbs were plural, expressing the originally plural character of the political structure of the new nation.

The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union that were drawn up the next year established a "firm league of friendship" among the states. Though reserving certain matters of common interest to "the United States in Congress assembled" and to an executive "Committee of the States," the states retained their "sovereignty, freedom, and independence" in most matters. Disunity was always a threat to this loose confederation of previously separate colonies with separate charters, and it seemed even more imminent once the common foe — Great Britain — was defeated. Moreover, a new plan of government seemed necessary for the new states that were scheduled to emerge from the Northwest Territory.

The Constitutional Convention of 1787 was therefore called to set up "a more perfect" and, one might say, a more lasting union than that provided by the Articles of Confederation. It established a stronger and more effective central government — but not, it is important to note, a uniform or unitary state. Instead, it created a *federal* system of dual national and state sovereignties. It deliberately allocated to the states a realm in which they could continue to exercise independent authority.

The scope of that realm and the extent of state independence have been subjects of debate ever since the Constitution was submitted to the states for ratification. The controversy involved a conflict between the basic principles of plurality and unity, which the Constitution supposedly was intended



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

to balance. Opponents of the proposed new system charged that it violated already existing and cherished states' rights. "Who authorized them to speak the language of *We, the people*, instead of, *We, the states*?" Patrick Henry demanded for the anti-Federalists in the Virginia ratifying convention of 1788.

In their *Federalist* papers of 1787-1788, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay defended the Constitution's federal plan against charges by the anti-Federalists that it was too centralized. "I hold it for a fundamental point," James Madison declared, "that an individual independence of the states is utterly irreconcilable with the idea of an aggregate sovereignty. I think, at the same time, that a consolidation of the states into one simple republic is not less unattainable than it would be inexpedient."

At the time, Madison urged that the national government be empowered to veto a law passed by a state, and hence supported the supremacy of the federal courts (which would give them the power of judicial veto

over state laws). Later, however, he objected to the great powers assumed by the Supreme Court under Chief Justice John Marshall, and laid the foundations for the modern concept of federalism by emphasizing that there is a reasonable middle ground between overweening federal power and total state independence.

Federalism, as interpreted by Madison then, and as still understood in the final third of the twentieth century, is constituted by two mutually exclusive, reciprocally limited fields of power — that of the national government and that of the states. The two authorities may be said to confront each other as equals across a precise constitutional line that defines their respective jurisdictions.

However, the “supremacy clause” in Article VI of the Constitution tended to belie the view that the federal and state governments were intended to be equal authorities and to justify the antagonism to the new plan on the part of such “states’ rights” protagonists as Patrick Henry. This key clause declares that the laws passed by Congress are “the supreme law of the land,” overriding “anything in the constitution or laws of any state to the contrary notwithstanding.”

Partly as a response to this clause, the anti-Federalists drafted the first ten amendments to the federal Constitution, which, aside from their purpose of guaranteeing individual rights, were also intended by their authors as a device for preserving states’ rights. The Tenth Amendment especially became important for this aim. “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states,” it declares, “are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.”

Controversy soon arose, however, about how broadly the powers “delegated to the United States” — to the national government — were to be construed. In 1798, for

example, Jeffersonian critics of the Adams administration viewed the Alien and Sedition Acts as an illegal seizure of power by the federal government in order to smash political opposition.

Jefferson himself asserted in the Kentucky Resolutions of 1798 that if the federal government assumed powers not specifically delegated to it, it was constitutional for a state to nullify any federal acts assuming such powers. “I am for preserving to the states the powers not yielded by them to the Union,” he wrote in 1799, “and to the legislature of the Union its constitutional share in the division of powers; and I am not for transferring all the powers of the states to the general government, and all those of that government to the executive branch.” And the Virginia Assembly, speaking to the same point, maintained that the powers of the federal government had been given it by a compact to which the states were parties, and that only powers expressly written into that compact might be legitimately exercised.

In 1832 South Carolina’s “Ordinance of Nullification” — directed against tariff laws that were believed to threaten the state’s economy — occasioned John C. Calhoun’s classical argument for the right of the states to nullify federal legislation. In a nation of diverse interests, but in which majority rule alone decides policy, he maintained, one part of the community, merely by being in the majority, can legally oppress and plunder another. To counteract this danger, he proposed his doctrine of the *concurrent majority*.

In a correct understanding of the U.S. Constitution, Calhoun said, it provided that the numerical majority of the community be represented in the House of Representatives and the concurrent majority in the Senate. Rule by a numerical majority alone, based on popular suffrage, would not be constitutional government at all, he de-

clared, but rather absolute government — the tyranny of the majority over the minority. He therefore advocated an extension of the power of the concurrent majority, represented by two senators from each state, to the right to “negative” or veto any legislation contrary to the interests of their state.

“It is, indeed, the negative power which makes the Constitution,” he asserted, “and the positive which makes the government. The one is the power of acting — and the other the power of preventing or arresting action. The two, combined, make constitutional governments.”

This famous doctrine was based on the fact, in Calhoun’s view, that “there are two different modes in which the sense of the community may be taken; one, simply by the right of suffrage, unaided; the other, by the right through a proper organism. Each collects the sense of the majority. But one regards numbers only and considers the whole community as a unit, having but one common interest throughout, and collects the sense of the greater number of the whole as that of the community. The other, on the contrary, regards interests as well as numbers, considering the community as made up of different and conflicting interests, as far as the action of the government is concerned, and takes the sense of each, through its majority or appropriate organ, and the united sense of all as the sense of the entire community. The former of these I shall call the numerical, or absolute majority; and the latter, the concurrent, or constitutional majority.”

Madison had formulated the opposing principle in 1830. The Constitution, he maintained, had not been framed by the governments of the component states nor by the majority of the people as a whole, but instead by the people in each state acting “in their highest sovereign capacity,” the same sovereignty that authorized the state constitutions. Federal authority, he

concluded, could thus not be annulled by any state individually.

President Andrew Jackson issued a forthright response to the nullification doctrines of South Carolina and of Calhoun. “I consider . . . the power to annul a law of the United States, assumed by one state,” he declared in 1832 (shortly before Calhoun had resigned as his Vice-President), “incompatible with the existence of the Union, contradicted expressly by the letter of the Constitution, unauthorized by its spirit, inconsistent with every principle on which it was founded, and destructive of the great object for which it was formed.” Furthermore, he insisted, the Constitution of the United States founded a *government*, not a league, and established a national unity that no state could legally breach through secession.

Less than thirty years after Jackson’s ringing confirmation of the federal union, secession became more than a rhetorical question. The unstable consensus, patched up by frequent compromises, broke apart as the issue of slavery and its expansion divided the two great sections of the country. The Democrats, the only broadly national party, split into two sectional factions, and the new antislavery Republican Party was able to capture the White House in 1860. The accession of the Republican standard bearer Abraham Lincoln to the presidency signaled to influential Southern leaders the necessity for the South to secede from the Union if it was to retain its economic and social system intact. And so a new confederacy — the Confederate States of America — was formed in 1861.

Jefferson Davis, the president of the new Confederacy, put the argument for secession in terms that went back to the Declaration of Independence. He appealed in his Inaugural Address to “the American idea that governments rest upon the consent of the governed, and that it is the right of the

people to alter or abolish governments whenever they become destructive to the ends for which they were established." By "the people," he made clear, he meant the citizens of each of the "sovereign states" that he saw as having constituted the previous "compact of the Union."

In Davis' view, a sameness of interests and ways of life was the only basis of enduring unity. Although the constitution of the new compact made it theoretically possible for Northern states to join the Confederacy, he noted that such a reunion would be "neither practicable nor desirable." "It is requisite," he argued, "there should be so much homogeneity that the welfare of every portion would be the aim of the whole. Where this does not exist, antagonisms are engendered which must and should result in separation." Thus, where Calhoun had sought to balance off diverse interests to maintain unity, Davis sought a unity based on homogeneity.

Against this argument for the natural right of secession, Abraham Lincoln, in his own First Inaugural Address, insisted that "universal law" as well as the Constitution itself imply that "the Union of these states is perpetual." The Union, he contended, was far older than the Constitution and went back to the Articles of Association of 1774; all subsequent agreements, including the Constitution, had merely perfected a Union that already existed in perpetuity. (The Articles of Confederation, as we have seen, proclaimed a "Perpetual Union.") Hence, Lincoln concluded, "no state, upon its own mere motion, can lawfully get out of the Union. . . . The Union is unbroken."

The conflict between the views set forth in the inaugural addresses of Davis and Lincoln was settled by over four years of bitter armed conflict, at a cost of a million military casualties on both sides. In the end, the

superior military and economic power of the North won, and the federal Union was preserved. Although the Northern victory for all practical purposes ended the secessionist movement, it by no means silenced the states' rights controversy.

Almost immediately after the war ended, President Andrew Johnson vetoed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 (which gave full citizenship to the newly freed Negro) on the grounds that it was an unwarranted invasion of states' rights. Doubts about the Act's constitutionality, even though it was repassed over Johnson's veto, led to its reformulation as the Fourteenth Amendment. This Amendment declared all native-born or naturalized persons to be citizens of the United States (thus in effect reversing the Dred Scott decision), and it prohibited any state from violating the rights of U.S. citizens, or from illegally depriving any of them of life, liberty, or property.

Interpretation of this restriction upon states' rights has been vigorously debated ever since. The right of the Southern states to legislate various types of racial discrimination was at one time affirmed, and at a later time denied, by the federal courts. President Harry S. Truman's Committee on Civil Rights, confronting the problem in 1947, concluded that the national government had a duty to take the lead in safeguarding civil rights. As the Committee had discovered an inability on the part of Negroes in some states to obtain their rights as citizens, it felt justified in calling for federal action to correct the situation. The Truman report held in effect that civil rights transcended states' rights.

These principles were applied when federal troops were sent to Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957 to protect Negro students attending a formerly segregated school. This astonishing federal intervention in what had long been held to be a local or state concern came about as a result of the landmark

Supreme Court decision in 1954 outlawing racial segregation in the public schools. Immediately the familiar cry of 'invasion of states' rights was heard, and the Supreme Court was defied in several cases by mobs and by some elected officials, including the governor of Alabama.

Other challenges to what had been considered the special preserve of the states, such as the Supreme Court decision of 1962 requiring a more equitable representation in state legislatures, evoked a vigorous reaction all over the nation. The Council of State Governments, organized to protest what it considered the Supreme Court's usurpation of state powers, proposed three amendments to counter the trend. One of the amendments would set up a "Court of the Union," composed of the chief justices of the highest state courts, that could overrule the Supreme Court in cases where federal and state powers conflict. Twelve states ratified one or more of the new antifederalist amendments before the public became even dimly aware of what they implied. As their implication became evident, Chief Justice Earl Warren summoned the lawyers of the nation in 1963 to initiate "a great national debate" on the whole question of the relation of federal and state power.

Arguing against the contention that this question had long ago been settled in the Constitutional Convention and in the debates on ratification of the Constitution, historian A. T. Mason declared in 1964 that the fundamental conflict had never been resolved. "The explanation of this never-ending wrangle," he suggested, "may lie in the Constitution itself, and in the nature of the government it establishes." For this reason, it appears likely that this perennial debate will continue for many years to come. [For further discussion of some of the matters treated in this section, see Chs. 3: CONSTITUTIONALISM and 4: GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE.]



Courtesy, Edward Kuekes, Cleveland "Plain Dealer"

"Something's gotta give!"; cartoon by Kuekes, 1958

## 2. PLURAL POWERS: LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND SECTIONAL

THE PLURALISTIC CHARACTER of American political authority has been especially manifest in the multiplicity of local self-governing units. A variety of local governments — district, county, town, township, and city — have existed in America from pre-Revolutionary times. "These corporations," Noah Webster noted in 1785, "for certain purposes, are independent of the [state] legislature; they make laws, appoint officers, and exercise jurisdiction within their own limits. As bodies politic, they are sovereign and independent; as members of a large community, they are mere subjects."

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French visitor, observed in 1835 that the United States had a centralized government, but not a centralized administration. "In no country in the world," he wrote, "does the law hold so absolute a language as in America; and



in no country is the right of applying it vested in so many hands." He praised the many "provincial institutions," especially the New England townships with their town meetings, as giving the people the chance to learn to use freedom in small matters, thus uniting local citizens through common interests, building a solid foundation for national strength, and working against a dangerous concentration of power in the central government.

Local governments proliferated and gained strength when the Northwest Territory was settled, and often preceded the establishment of territorial and state governments. As the new states wrote their constitutions, forms for county, township, town, and city governments were legally established. Small autonomous school districts, not connected with municipalities, were authorized by the states; and their unification into larger entities became the subject of dispute a century later.

It was not until after World War I that serious apprehension began to be felt concerning the threat of the central government to the autonomy of the local governments in the spheres of policing, social welfare, public utilities, sanitation, education, and recreation. New economic and social conditions were accompanied by a decrease in local autonomy and an increase in central control.

Economist Henry C. Simons, speaking out against this tendency in 1945, maintained that the roots of progress lie in local freedom and responsibility, since large governments, like large corporations, "lack the creative powers of a multiplicity of competitive smaller units." In his view, an orderly world is highly decentralized, whereas centralization is a product of disorder or disaster, as most notably exemplified in time of war. This flatly contradicts the unitary view that the more centralized the government, the more orderly the community.

The welfare functions that the national government had begun to assume with the

New Deal legislation of the 1930s were seen by many critics as ominous steps toward complete centralization. William J. Grede, president of the National Association of Manufacturers in 1952, warned against the surrender of local service functions to what he termed "the federal octopus," and he stated it as a principle that "service responsibilities should be performed by the smallest unit of government able to perform them well and efficiently." He expressed the fear that by imposing a rigid, uniform pattern on all activities, big government would stamp out the "rich and constructive diversity" of American life.

Others were not so fearful. Sociologist Robert Nisbet observed in the 1950s that "the single most decisive influence upon Western social organization has been the rise and development of the centralized territorial state." Centralized, unitary democracy had become increasingly attractive to American liberals, in his view, as the only means for rehabilitation of depressed, "problem groups" in society. Ideally, he went on to say, the centralized state toward which unitary democracy tends is an "inherently pluralist" one, in which the central political power is limited by the claims of a plurality of local associations.

Thus far we have considered local communities smaller than the states. Since the early eighteenth century there have also been community interests larger than those of the individual states — namely those of the sections or regions. When ratification of the Constitution was being considered, Richard Henry Lee objected that one government and one legislature could never take care of the large American territory because the different customs and opinions of the various sections would make unity impossible.

After ratification and the formal achievement of unity, President Washington, who was apprehensive of sectional divisions and antipathies, urged that the new nation "frown indignantly on the first dawning of

an attempt to alienate one portion of our country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties that now link together the various parts." Despite the warning, however, sectionalism appeared from the beginning to threaten the achievement of a national character, identity, and unity.

The great sectional split that mortally threatened that unity arose between the North and the South. The Civil War, which settled that schism, seemed to some to have put an end to sectional division. "We cherish the belief that sectionalism is, and of right should be, dead and buried with the past," declared the National Grange farmers' organization in 1874. "In our Agricultural Brotherhood and its purposes we shall recognize no North, no South, no East, no West."

Nevertheless, sectional identity and differentiation remained an observable fact. Frederick Jackson Turner maintained in 1932 that the continued use of section names in popular speech — such as "New England," "the Middle West," and "the Southwest" — proved that the sections still existed. They needed to be studied, he suggested, in order to discover the natural boundaries of economic and social regions, the influences these had on one another, and the ways in which the various sections could understand each other and live in peace. Turner went as far as to say that the nation was really a federation of sections rather than of states. In the complexity of a federal system of government, he declared, regional planning is necessary, as well as the cooperation in regional projects (such as river development) of regional authorities, the states, and the federal government.

Regional planning became a reality in 1933 with the establishment of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), an independent public corporation with a board of three directors authorized to construct dams and power plants and to develop the economic and social resources of the Tennessee Valley region, which included parts of Ken-

rucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia. David Lilienthal, one of TVA's original directors, expressed and applied his belief in the compatibility of democratic government and decentralized administration with advanced technology. TVA combined central planning and administration by local authorities, demonstrating a new form of political pluralism.

The ever more pressing problems of urban and metropolitan areas at the middle of the twentieth century brought forth other plans for new regional arrangements that transcended the traditional city, county, and state divisions. Most notable of these, perhaps, was President Lyndon Johnson's "Demonstration Cities Program," which, commented *Life* magazine in 1966, was a chance for "creative federalism." The program, said *Life*, unlike some federal projects in recent years, was intended not so much to expand the activities of the federal government as to produce "more power for everybody to share." The program, on the one hand, would make badly needed funds available to cities that "use their imaginations" in figuring out how best to spend them. On the other hand, the federal government — "by virtue of its capacity to see and act across the boundaries of local government" — would be able to "coordinate, prevent overlap, and offer guidance of many kinds." [For a discussion of the role of political parties in the American democratic process, see Ch. 4: GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE; and for treatment of other matters touched on in the above section see Chs. 2: FRONTIER, 5: GENERAL WELFARE, 19: RURAL AND URBAN, and 21: EDUCATION.]

### 3. SOCIAL PLURALISM AND VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

THE LIFE OF A PEOPLE is not constituted solely by matters of law and politics. When the United States was formed, government



Library of Congress

A "working-bee" on the lawn at the Oneida Community

was generally considered to have mainly police and taxing functions, with social life remaining outside of its jurisdiction. Some form of nonpolitical organization was therefore required to enable Americans to cooperate in achieving various social aims.

This need was filled by the establishment of a multiplicity of voluntary private associations for every conceivable social purpose: education, insurance, culture, health, burial, etc. Voluntary associations were also characteristic of British social life, out of which American society originally arose, but in the United States they were much more widespread, popularly based, and spontaneous, and they had much more room in which to operate. They also became a salutary counterweight, in the opinion of some commentators, to the leveling, conformist tendency of American life.

Tocqueville, for example, observing in 1835 that the equality established in the United States left men free to be diverse, judged that this freedom was being well used by Americans in their formation of an infinite variety of small private societies.

Such associations, according to Tocqueville, were a wholesome antidote to the leveling effect of democracy. Associating by choice was one way men could keep from being lost in the democratic crowd — in "the people."

However, criticism of some varieties and aspects of private associations was rife. That they might serve special interests and be dangerous to the common good was suggested as early as 1798 by the self-taught radical democrat William Manning. The Society of the Cincinnati, a hereditary patriotic organization of officers of the Revolution and their male descendants, constituted "a dangerous body," he declared, which had bilked the hard-working public out of "millions and millions of dollars." Medical societies existed to raise physicians' fees extravagantly. The colleges and academies suborned the young to depart from "the true principles of republicanism" and taught their students to demand high wages for their services as preachers and teachers. Above all, Manning was suspicious of the ministers' associations and doubted their

members' devotion to "the true principles of our free government."

In the early nineteenth century, trade unions, benevolent societies, cooperatives, mutual aid associations, literary societies, religious sects, experimental communities, and other types of associations increased and multiplied. Many utopian communities were founded as private associations: the Oneida Community in New York, the Brook-Farm Association in Massachusetts, Horace Greeley's Sylvania Association in Pennsylvania, and many others.

The fever of associationism in the period was, according to some observers, simply a reaction of intellectuals to the increasing impersonality of the centralized state and of the factory system. Others, however, saw the short-lived utopian communities not as a natural reaction to abnormal social conditions but rather as an unwholesome retreat from the responsibilities of a pluralistic society. Reviewing the phenomenon in 1909, Herbert Croly wrote that it had not been effective because it was "unofficial associated action" when it should have been "official collective action," that is, organized political action to change and improve society.

So conspicuous was the variety of voluntary associations that foreign observers were still remarking on it in 1900. The Russian political scientist Moisey Ostrogorski theorized that since the individual in the United States was continually changing his job, residence, and social position, he had to create artificial traditions by seizing every excuse to form associations — patriotic, secret, fraternal, economic, political. In addition, the remarkable plurality of Protestant religious sects was a phenomenon that no observer could miss. The history of religion in America, after the early disestablishment of the churches, is largely the story of voluntary associations.

Whether voluntary associations would continue to survive in the twentieth century

was seriously questioned by many writers who viewed their possible disappearance with alarm. "A free society," wrote Simons in 1945, "must be organized largely through voluntary associations." He reasoned that freedom of association tends to support the rule of law rather than of men; that many small organizations give opportunities to many individuals instead of to a few; and that the organization of new associations under a free enterprise system helps keep the economy flexible and strong.

In a pluralist democracy, as opposed to a unitary one, Nisbet declared in 1962, the state can and should be just one of man's associations. Freedom of choice among "clear cultural alternatives" is essential to personal integrity. Alternatives should be offered in all the small social groups — domestic, religious, occupational, professional, and local. Nisbet saw associations such as labor unions and cooperatives as constructively supporting both capitalism and economic freedom by giving their members a sense of personal belonging. Totalitarian states, he asserted, either destroy such associations or make them mere cogs in the centrally controlled political and social machine. [For further discussion of some of the matters treated here, see Chs. 1: NATIONAL CHARACTER and 2: FRONTIER.]

#### 4. THE MELTING POT: ETHNIC HOMOGENEITY AND VARIETY

ONE OF THE MAJOR FACTORS in unifying a nation, according to many modern statesmen and political thinkers, is ethnic homogeneity. In this view, the more diverse the ethnic strains in a nation, the more precarious its unity will be. With this in mind Australia and other originally Anglo-Saxon communities have recently prohibited the immigration of non-Caucasians and have favored British and North European stocks. A

much crueler and more unjust procedure was followed by the German Nazi regime with regard to the Jews — to attain the ideal aim of “one folk” under “one party” and “one leader.” The United States has veered between policies of ethnic pluralism and homogeneity during its history.

Despite the predominantly English character of the citizenry when the nation was founded, the people of the United States even then were a mixture. There were Scots, Irish, Germans, Swedes, Dutch, French, Italians, Spanish, and Portuguese, besides the original people of the land, the Indians, and the African Negroes, most of whom had been brought here as slaves. Yet there could be no doubt of the preponderantly Anglo-Saxon strain in the culture. Tocqueville, though he described the Indians and Negroes in great detail in 1835, considered the Anglo-Saxon to be the “real Americans” and spoke of the “sameness” of the Americans in all the states.

Nevertheless, 30 to 40 percent of the white citizens of the new country were of non-English descent or origin. Both tolerance and intolerance were shown in the early decades of the republic toward those who were not of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant origin. George Washington struck the keynote of tolerance in 1783 in his statement of welcome to people of all nations and religions. But every colony save Rhode Island at one time or another enacted discriminatory laws against Roman Catholics and Jews, and groups such as the Germans were regarded as unassimilable by those who considered the new country essentially English in language, religion, and culture.

The Naturalization Act of 1798 has been called the first organized attack on the immigrant in the national period of U.S. history. Coming at the same time as the Alien and Sedition Acts, it was a Federalist response to the large number of immigrants

and refugees that had poured in since the French Revolution and affiliated themselves with the opposition Jeffersonian party. “The debates on these measures indicate,” historian Carl Wittke wrote, “that some would have been glad to abolish the naturalization process altogether. Some wanted to deprive the immigrant of all political rights; others were content to keep him from holding public office.” As finally passed, the Naturalization Act raised the residence requirement for citizenship from five to fourteen years. It was repealed when the Jeffersonians won power and was replaced by the old, more lenient law.

Yet as immigrants came in increasing numbers during the first half of the nineteenth century, particularly from Ireland, they were viewed with suspicion by many Americans. Mayor Aaron Clark of New York, for example, complained in 1837 that the immigrants were a burden to his city as paupers, and were “wild” and “mischievous strangers,” many of whom “scorn to hold opinions in harmony with the true spirit of our government.” Charity and employment should go, he said, to descendants of the soldiers of the Revolution and of the War of 1812, not to these undeserving newcomers.

Others were not so fearful of the new ethnic groups, and even welcomed their arrival on the American scene. James Fenimore Cooper, for instance, praised the liberalizing influence of immigrants from many lands, and inveighed against the “oppressive intolerance” of some native Americans. Every citizen had the right to his own customs and morals, he maintained, as long as they were not contrary to the laws.

Carl Schurz, in 1859, in response to three decades of often violent agitation against Irish and German immigrants, urged a continued liberal immigration policy in the United States, “the colony of free humani-

ty." The mingling of various ethnic strains, he argued, regenerates the old stocks and leads to new progress: "Mankind becomes young again by its different elements being shaken together, by race crossing race and mind penetrating mind."

New waves of immigration between the Civil War and World War I included nationalities rarely seen before: Russians, eastern European Jews, Poles, Hungarians, Bohemians, Yugoslavians, Italians, Chinese, and Japanese. These exotic new strains led to new suspicions and alarms. In 1914, Edward Alsworth Ross, a distinguished sociologist, enumerated the "social effects of immigration," all of them bad, in his view. As "characteristic" of immigrants in a Pennsylvania mining town, he noted such "traits" as heavy drinking, sexual immorality, venereal disease, ignorance, uncleanness, immodesty, pauperism, insanity, delinquency, a lowering of the status of women, and child labor.

Barriers of language, education, and religion, Ross maintained, made the various ethnic groups hostile to one another and fostered division among them, as well as between them and "native" Americans. Furthermore, the public schools had no chance to Americanize the immigrants' children because most of them went to parochial schools. Immigrants were also responsible, according to Ross, for radicalism in the labor movement and corruption in politics. All in all, he concluded, they were a "drag" on American social progress.

Louis D. Brandeis, in response to such attitudes and criticisms, said in 1915 that the faith expressed in the motto *E Pluribus Unum* had been well justified in the case of the various ethnic groups that made up the United States. Native Americans had done their best for the immigrants, and the immigrants of every race and nation had contributed something of special value to America. This had been possible because of the es-



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"This is a white man's government"; "Harper's," 1868

sential American ideal of "inclusive brotherhood." "America has believed," he declared, "that in differentiation, not in uniformity, lies the path of progress."

The term "melting pot" (first used in 1908 by the British writer Israel Zangwill as the title of a successful play) became a favorite metaphor for the process by which this pluralistic unity was supposedly being achieved. It expressed the vague ideal of the different peoples shedding their foreignness, becoming loyal citizens, and yet contributing something of their original culture and characteristics to the brand-new American amalgam. However, Congress passed laws in 1917, 1921, and 1924 that restricted immigration and set up quotas favoring northern and western European ethnic groups as against the "undesirable" peoples of other regions. These laws reflected an influential body of opinion that opposed the continuation of America as a melting pot.

Henry Pratt Fairchild, like Edward Ross an eminent sociologist, supported this opinion in his book *The Melting-Pot Mistake* (1926), which contended that the United States would lose its vigor and its identity because of diverse immigrant groups that had not been and never would be assimilated. He compared the nation to a tree and the immigrants to parasites that suck life out of its host while "boring from within." "The unwholesome influence of alien ideas," he wrote, ". . . may be compared with harsh and uncongenial winds which blow upon trees, dwarfing and distorting them." Immigrants either "bleed America," he declared, by making money and taking it back to the Old Country, or they form enclaves, where they live a separate group existence unrelated to that of the nation as a whole.

Such anti-immigrant attitudes could not help but have a harmful effect on the personalities of the children of immigrants. Thus Louis Adamic, considering in 1934 the special problem of 30 million second-generation Americans, concluded that they tended to feel inferior to their fellow citizens of native stock while at the same time lacking the distinctive cultural heritage that had given their parents strength. The heritage was not passed on, partly because the parents were too busy making a living and adjusting to the American scene, partly because the children were ashamed of it. As a consequence, Adamic said, there was cultural poverty and ignorance among the children and a tendency to be politically neutral or lethargic.

The plight of second-generation Americans was widely recognized at mid-century, and various attempts were made to deal with it. The public schools in many cities tried to acquaint the children of immigrants with the richness of their heritage and to make them respect it, and the value of "cultural pluralism" in American life was em-

phasized by a number of thinkers, in the tradition of Schurz and Brandeis. Furthermore, a new social trend began to be evident. The *grandchildren* of immigrants, in sharp distinction from *their* parents, were often markedly affirmative of their ancestral heritage and identity and far less concerned with concealing or ignoring their ethnic roots. In turn, the wider American society, no longer inundated by waves of new immigrants, became more tolerant of, and even actively receptive to, cultural and ethnic diversity.

In 1943, Wendell Willkie stated the case anew for a pluralistic society and strongly opposed racial and national prejudice. Minorities, he asserted, are rich assets of democracy, a source of new ideas and a testing ground for old ones. Immigrants had been partners in building a democratic society in the past. With understanding and respect, differences could be preserved as distinct contributions to American society in the future.

Official confirmation of this view of the melting pot came in 1965, with the passage of a new, nondiscriminatory immigration law that overturned the old principle of "Nordic supremacy" in such legislation. George Washington's stand of 1783 had therefore apparently become American policy in the twentieth century. However, the new law, while not discriminating against any single ethnic group on the face of it, was in continued opposition to the nineteenth-century policy of unrestricted immigration, for it sharply limited the total number of persons who could immigrate to the country in any given year. In this sense it may not have been a reversal of policy at all, for Americans had never been disturbed by a *few* foreigners coming into their midst; it had been the great numbers of newcomers who had caused most of the distress in the past, and a new influx might cause it in the future if restrictions on immigration

were further relaxed. [For discussion of the varied character of Americans, see Ch. 1: NATIONAL CHARACTER; for another treatment of U.S. immigration policies and their effect on the implied promise of America to the world, see Ch. 25: AMERICAN DESTINY; and for a review of the contribution of the various immigrant groups to American life, see Ch. 12: MINORITIES.]

## 5. PROBLEMS OF PLURALISM

THE PRESENCE OF DIVERSITY and the striving for unity have together characterized American life since the beginning. The classical political example, of course, is the struggle after the Revolutionary War to create a federal unity out of the loose confederation of states that had won independence from Great Britain. The struggle to re-create that unity after the Civil War was perhaps even more agonizing, because during the interim the problem had been vastly complicated by sectional, economic, and social factors, and by "the mystic chords of memory" to which Abraham Lincoln made reference at the close of his First Inaugural Address.

The question that underlay these political crises, and also the social difficulties occasioned by the waves of immigrants that entered the country between 1820 and 1930, was a perennial one that had troubled all states and governments. How pluralistic may a society be and still remain unified? Or, put another way, how unified does a pluralistic society have to be in order to survive?

Could the new nation have achieved unity — have become "one nation indivisible" — while maintaining a loose, confederate connection among the states? Did the new federal Constitution impose a centralized uniformity that suppressed state autonomy, or did it strike a just balance between the needs of centralized government and the

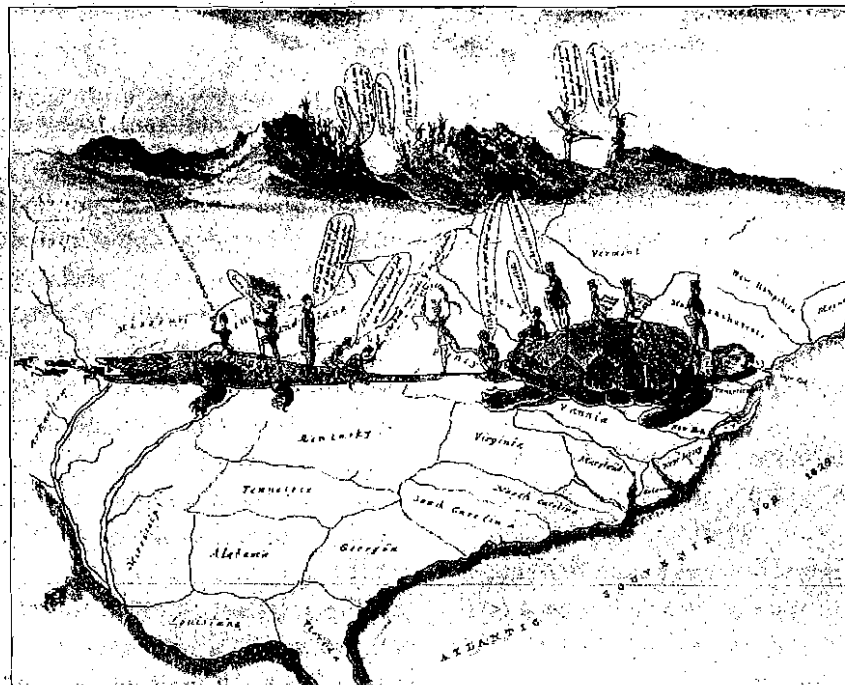
needs of the states? These were the questions that were hotly debated in the 1780s.

Could the growing continental republic remain one people if it continued to be divided on sectional lines into two distinctly different economic and social orders — if it remained, in Lincoln's phrase, "half slave and half free"? Or would restriction of the development of the South's economic and social system constitute an illegitimate and unjust suppression of local and regional ways and wishes? These were the issues that troubled the nation in the 1840s and 1850s.

The relatively homogeneous population of the original thirteen states was transformed into a mixture of ethnic and religious groups by the vast number of immigrants that arrived between 1820 and 1930. During little more than a century something over 32 million Europeans, about 1 million Asians, and about 4.5 million persons from other countries of the Americas came to the United States, helping to swell its population from less than 10 million under President Madison to more than 120 million under President Hoover. But many of the newcomers did not even speak English, although they, or their children, soon learned it, and some Americans were anxious lest the nation's unity be lost.

Since the early 1930s the problems of disunion have seemed to be economic rather than political or social. Franklin D. Roosevelt was one of the first to speak of a portion of the country's people — one-third of the nation, he said — that was somehow not really a part of it. The fraction changed in the succeeding years — President Lyndon Johnson spoke of one-sixth — but the notion did not. One heard talk of the "other" America, or the "invisible" America — that large group (nobody really knew how large) that did not participate in the unprecedented wealth of the "society of abundance" that was America's pride and prom-





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Sectionalism lampooned during the 1828 campaign between Jackson and John Quincy Adams

ise to the world, and that therefore seemed to threaten the oneness that was also a point of pride.

Among the theoretical solutions of the problem of unity and diversity, the extremes are complete anarchy and total uniformity. The former — a state of things in which everyone does exactly as he likes — has never obtained in any existing nation or country and could never obtain for long unless men radically changed their nature. (Nevertheless, the United States has often been called anarchic by foreign observers hailing from more hierarchically ordered societies.)

At the other extreme is the type of society that is called totalitarian, in which almost all political, economic, social, and cultural matters are controlled by the central government and the aim is as much uniformity as can be attained. The leading recent examples of totalitarian states are Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Communist Russia; a good deal of uniformity *is* attainable, as such examples show. Nevertheless, even in these countries, less of it was actually attained than the rulers probably wanted.

The American people have chosen a system of government that combines a centralized authority with a wide diversity of opinions, ways, faiths, cultures, and so forth — ideally at least. However, many serious observers of the American scene would oppose the claim that the United States has achieved anything like the perfect solution of the age-old problem. Ever since Tocqueville, a host of writers, both domestic and foreign, have decried the conformist tenor of American society, and many of them have asserted that America was actually more uniform and less pluralistic than traditional European societies.

Thus James Bryce, for example — actually a very sympathetic observer — was disturbed in 1888 by the similarity of state and municipal governments in America, by the countrywide sameness of curricula in spite of the proliferation of school districts, by the slightness of sectional differences, and by what he viewed as a tendency to conformity in the American character. Nevertheless, Bryce predicted that complexity and diversity would increase as the nation matured, as intellectuals advanced in num-

bers and in importance, and as the dominance of the businessman declined.

In the view of a number of sociologists in the 1950s and 1960s, U.S. society had developed in a quite different direction than that predicted by Bryce. Robert Nisbet, for example, asserted in 1962 that the twentieth century had seen a further leveling off of local, regional, and associative differences; a nationalization, or standardization, of culture and of taste generally; and an increase in the influence of government over management, labor, education, religion, and social welfare. Indeed, the only hope, in his view, was that the alienation of individuals from the primary social groups had become so intolerable that they would seek once more a real, living, interpersonal community.

A more evocative picture of what such commentators mean by standardization may be gained from Malvina Reynolds' song, "Little Boxes," also written in 1962.

Little boxes on the hillside,  
Little boxes made of ticky tacky:  
Little boxes on the hillside,  
Little boxes all the same.  
There's a green one, and a pink one,  
And a blue one, and a yellow one:  
And they're all made out of ticky tacky,  
And they all look just the same.

The people in the houses, the song declared, all engage in standard professions and occupations.

And they're all made out of ticky tacky,  
And they all look just the same.

The children follow the same, standardized path from school on up to the university, and then they too

get put in boxes  
And they all come out the same.

Suburbia, with its little boxes, both phys-

ical and personal, was said by Maurice Stein in 1960 to be the "setting" for the social and psychological "disorganization" that he saw everywhere in American life. Whatever their original reasons for moving to the suburbs — they may in fact have sought a more free and individualistic existence — suburbanites, according to Stein, had accepted sameness as a way of life. Exurbanites — a higher income level of suburbanites — pursued dreams of being different from the rest of the "organization men" who staffed the executive and advertising offices. But they too were finding it increasingly difficult to realize their dream, partly because others, from the lower echelons, were always catching up to them and imitating their style of living. The "dark aspect" of mid-twentieth-century life, said Stein, was a uniform pursuit of "success" defined in marketing terms, instead of a diverse development of personal integrity.

Discussing the American adolescent of the 1950s, Stein declared that "apparently the sheer fact of idiosyncratic experience has become inaccessible and even threatening." However, like Nisbet, he too saw in the very anxiety of suburbanites to conform the possibility of light reappearing after the "eclipse of community." Neuroses caused by the struggle to maintain uniform standards reflected a desire, he said, for something deeper and more human than mere status. This desire, he predicted, would eventually bring about the revival of a truly pluralistic community in America.

More than a century after Tocqueville's warnings of the 1830s, then, the same dread alternatives appeared to face the American people. On the one hand, individuals and groups shut off from participation in any significant community, and pursuing their own isolated, discrete satisfactions. On the other hand, in spite of the official affirmation of diversity and variety, an almost overwhelming compulsion to conform and to follow uniform and standardized ways,

without, however, the rich human satisfaction that participation in a common life had given societies in the past.

Moreover, in the twentieth century just as in the nineteenth, anarchistic individualism and social conformism seemed to reinforce each other. The individuals in a society without hierarchical values apparently felt compelled to follow the crowd, whether this satisfied their deepest longings or not. Despite their wealth, power, and technical ingenuity, Americans were described by many observers at mid-century as personally troubled and insecure. The solidity and strength that had come from communal belonging in previous eras of man's history seemed to be missing.

There was also a good deal of resentment, violence, and what has been called "justifiable paranoia" on the part of those groups in American society that felt excluded from the promise of American life. The nonviolent, markedly idealistic sit-ins and demonstrations that marked the civil rights movement during the 1950s were followed during the 1960s by violent riots, as the Negro minority's intensified grasping for equality was frustrated by actual conditions. Even the college students, who a mere ten years before had been said to be the least socially concerned and least politically active student group in the world, erupted in angry protests and tumultuous encounters with police authority, notably at the University of California and at Columbia.

The riots and protests might be interpreted as an expression of devotion to American ideals and values on the part of groups that really took them seriously and wanted to realize them in America. This in fact was the interpretation of a number of writers. Nevertheless, the protests were met by opposition on the part of a large portion of the American people who, whatever the purity or intensity of their devotion to those ideals and values, did not view them in the

same light. In itself this was a sign that serious fissures were developing in the apparently stable surface of the nation's life.

If the bulk of American Negroes came to feel irremediably hopeless and helpless about their lot, it was possible that they would withdraw into ethnic isolation — a process, as it were, of self-segregation — and carry on there a lonely struggle for place and power. This was certainly one of the many meanings of the cry of "Black Power" that arose from some militant young Negro leaders in the 1960s. If this occurred it would be another sign that the American community was being subjected to strong fragmenting forces.

Basic questions of unity, plurality, and community were raised by these events. If national unity depends on a people's being of the same ethnic stock and the same religion, and on its having the same general culture, then Americans — with all their talent for standardization and disposition to conform — had not and probably never could achieve it. But sameness, as many writers have pointed out during the last hundred years, is not the only basis for unity. Indeed, it may be that variety provides a much stronger and a more solid basis. Community, after all, connotes otherness as well as oneness. A community is a union of different individuals; may it not also be a union of different groups, faiths, and ways?

"The diversity of American life is often painful," said Negro author Ralph Ellison in 1966, "frequently burdensome and always a source of conflict, but in it lies our faith and our hope."

How much conflict can be sustained without destroying the unity is of course the problem. A century ago, the difference proved too great, and a fragmentation occurred that was repaired only at the cost of a terrible war. It has been argued that the split was not inevitable and that some harmonious reconciliation might have been achieved. Lincoln himself declared that he

was willing to guarantee constitutional protection of the South's "peculiar institution" and to accept a federal Union that was half slave and half free.

Whether anything would have worked is debatable. All civil wars are avoidable in retrospect, and yet every one of them seems at the time to be inevitable — an "irrepressible conflict," as William H. Seward called our own in 1858, "between opposing and enduring forces." Concord depends on a certain minimum amount of concession on the part of all, a consensus about the values and aims of the common life of a people. Agreement on the legal and juridical procedures for arranging things is not enough. Appeals to constitutionality and to

law and order fall on deaf ears when matters that are deemed of vital interest or of higher justice are involved.

What this minimum consensus was, or is, was uncertain as the United States entered the last third of the twentieth century. Would it include the rich diversity that was praised by men like MacLeish and Ellison? Or would it, for the sake of cohesion, be more restrictive, abolishing or segregating in enclaves the minor groupings and subcultures of the country? It still remained to be seen just what kind of "one" would emerge out of America's "many." The more sanguine remained hopeful that it would be a multicolored and highly diverse unity — both various and strongly bound.