CHAPTER ONE

In Locke's Step

Disheartened liberals and disgruntled ex-liberals in the early twenty-first century should take some comfort in the fact that liberalism in America has a longer and more glorious history than the competition. It is older than socialism and conservatism—the beginnings of which are often traced to the Anglo-Irish statesman Edmund Burke's classic work *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)—and has outlasted fascism and communism. One could argue that liberalism's protean qualities as much as its inherent appeal account for its longevity and significance and explain the constant fear of conservatives that at any moment liberalism will reemerge as a powerful force in American politics. After all, the ability of liberalism (and leading liberals in the United States) to respond effectively and forcefully to changing times and national crises, especially during the 1930s and the early 1960s, is among its most notable characteristics.

Many historians and political scientists trace the origins of liberalism or liberal thought to the English physician and philosopher John Locke (1632–1704). Locke's ideas on liberty, tolerance, and the rights of the individual exerted a profound influence on, among others, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Madison read Locke and various Enlightenment thinkers while a student at Princeton University in the early

1770s. In the words of the scholar Charles Murray, "We in the United States think of Locke as an intellectual inspiration of the American Founders, which he was."[1] The historian Peter Gay, editor of *The Enlightenment: A Comprehensive Anthology*, notes that Locke's correspondence in his *Letters Concerning Toleration* (1689) grew out of his "liberal political thought and Latitudinarian Protestantism." He adds, "Locke's plea is distinctly modern"; it holds that "it is not dissenters who threaten society, but society which by suppressing dissenters produces threats for itself."[2]

Reading Locke's original words, the contemporary reader can discern clear views on issues of critical importance to U.S. society, which in our time often divide the left and right, liberals and conservatives. As a prime example, Locke's thoughts on what we would today call the separation of church and state: "I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion, and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other. If this not be done, there can be no end put to the controversies that will be always arising between those that have, or at least pretend to have, on the one side, a concernment for the interest of men's souls, and, on the other side, a care of the commonwealth."[3] This passage could be on the wall at the national headquarters of People for the American Way.

Nearly ninety years after Locke wrote the *Letters*, as well as two other works that profoundly influenced eighteenth-century American political thought (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Two Treatises of Government*), the Declaration of Independence incorporated his ideas on the rights of man and provided the most famous phrase in U.S. history: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (the last of which Locke called property)—the "unalienable rights." It would be presumptuous to call the Declaration of Independence a *liberal* document as the word is understood today. In the ongoing political tug-of-war between liberals and conservatives over possession of the Founding Fathers, both sides introduce impressive evidence to support their claims.

Yet the concept of "equality for all," a cornerstone of liberalism since

the early 1960s, can be found within the Declaration of Independence. At the height of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, the historians Allan Nevins and Henry Steele Commager wrote: "There is the truth that all men are created equal—that all men are equal in the sight of God and equal before the law. There were, to be sure, even as Jefferson wrote, many inequalities in America: the inequality of rich and poor, of men and women, of black and white. But the failure of a society to live up to an ideal does not invalidate the ideal, and the doctrine of equality, once announced, worked as a leaven in American thought."[4]

Still, if one wishes to provide solid evidence of Jefferson's sympathetic disposition toward liberalism—as the term is understood today—there is perhaps no better example than a brief excerpt from a letter he wrote in 1816 to Samuel Kercheval: "But I know also, that laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths disclosed, and manners and opinions change with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also, and keep pace with the times."[5] Jefferson establishes a pattern of cause and effect in accordance with the view of liberals—people change, institutions follow—and includes the idea of progress, which is often regarded as synonymous with liberalism.

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Given that the Republican Party in the early twenty-first century stands for the Patriot Act, unlimited detention of suspected terrorists, and the use of torture under certain circumstances, it is ironic that Abraham Lincoln, the president most associated with the concept of freedom, was the first Republican ever elected president. The irony is not acknowledged by most Republicans today. The annual Lincoln Day Dinner remains a popular event in GOP circles, and even Republicans from below the Mason-Dixon Line pay homage to their leader, although usually not with the dedication and enthusiasm of their colleagues from the north.

Still, Lincoln was a Republican; whether he was also a liberal is not as apparent. Though the question is not without merit, one has to be careful to declare unequivocally that Abraham Lincoln fits the classic definition. Among other things, there is the risk of applying contemporary standards of liberalism, civil rights, and black-white relations to a political figure from the mid-nineteenth century. I can recall a radicalized black student from UC Berkeley condemning Lincoln as a racist and mocking Lincoln's role in ending slavery during an invited presentation to my seventh-grade history class in 1969. That guy would not have considered Lincoln a liberal, except perhaps in the pejorative sense.

It is natural to consider Lincoln's presidency as embodying the spirit of liberalism, if not its intent. Assessing the substance and tone of Lincoln's famous "house divided" speech, delivered in Springfield, Illinois, in 1858, the political scientists Morton Frisch and Richard Stevens offer this view: "His theme in that speech was that political events had been building up in such a way as to destroy the cause of human freedom forever, unless they were reversed."[6] Whether Lincoln's hatred of slavery stemmed from his love of black people—most historians think not—is beside the point when considering Lincoln's place within the history of American liberalism. Along with the mounting casualties, the prolongation of the Civil War saw a hardening of Lincoln's commitment to destroying the institution of slavery, and to extending an ever increasing number of freedoms to African Americans. The historian James McPherson observed, "In the last year of the war, the President [also] endorsed giving the right to vote to two overlapping groups: literate African-Americans and all black veterans of the Union army. . . . When Lincoln came under enormous pressure in the summer of 1864 to waive his insistence on Southern acceptance of the abolition of slavery as a precondition for peace negotiations, he eloquently refused to do so."[7]

In the decades after the Civil War, freed slaves living in the South experienced violence, racism, and both subtle and overt discrimination as politicians and once-fiery abolitionists in the North moved on to

other issues. Adding to the injustice, the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) introduced the idea of "separate but equal" accommodations, which had a devastating impact on black communities across the South. As Hugh Brogan notes in his history of the United States, the Court "was entering into a conspiracy to deny adequate education to the blacks, because the Southern states had no intention of giving blacks equal facilities, even of they were separate, and the Court had no intention of inquiring whether they had done so or not."[8] Nearly a hundred years after the South surrendered to the North at Appomattox in April 1865, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act, which represented the final historic achievement of the civil rights movement and a triumph for liberalism. Abraham Lincoln would probably have been surprised that it took an entire century for the South—and the rest of the country—to come around.

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In his seminal work *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, Richard Hofstadter wrote about Woodrow Wilson, "He believed in small business, competitive economics, colonialism, Anglo-Saxon and white supremacy, and a suffrage restricted to men, long after such beliefs had become objects of mordant critical analysis."[9] Nearly a hundred years after Wilson was first elected president of the United States, the last four items on that list would make liberals cringe. Yet there has always been a degree of ambiguity about liberal presidents in the twentieth century. Not everything they believe in or support adheres to the post-1960s party line. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson expanded American involvement in Vietnam; President Carter boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics; and President Clinton successfully lobbied for passage of a welfare reform bill in 1996 that many liberals felt was cruel and punitive toward single mothers.

In many ways, however, Wilson fits the profile of a modern liberal. For one thing, he was a Democrat. We take it for granted today that the vast majority of liberals reside within the Democratic Party, but in the

fifty years between the Civil War and Wilson's being elected president, two Republican presidents above all embodied the ideas of progress and freedom: Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt. Wilson's ambitious agenda was dubbed the "New Freedom" program, thereby combining two words that have been closely associated with liberalism ever since. Twenty years later, President Franklin Roosevelt put forth the New Deal, and a quarter of a century after that momentous series of reforms, John F. Kennedy offered Americans a New Frontier.

Wilson's notable accomplishments included creation of the Federal Reserve System, the strengthening of antitrust legislation, and passage of the country's first federal law covering child labor, as well as a law establishing an eight-hour workday for railroad employees. In April 1917, a few months after being elected to a second term, Wilson engineered the entry of the United States into World War I. And notwithstanding the 1976 Republican vice presidential candidate Bob Dole's caustic remark that the twentieth century had been an era of "Democrat wars," Wilson's decision to align the United States with Britain, France, and Russia and against Germany and Austria was a monumental event in the history of European and American liberalism. As the classicist Victor Davis Hanson observed, World War I was "a war that was not so much a misunderstanding of like-minded aristocratically governed European constitutional states as a struggle for the liberal future of Europe itself."[10] Wilson's famous declaration that the "world must be made safe for democracy" was not just rhetoric.

The United States may have entered the war to "save democracy" abroad, but on the home front patriotic fervor and wartime hysteria led to some profoundly undemocratic and illiberal acts. The socialist presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs was put in prison for delivering a speech denouncing the war, and the Wilson administration signed into law both an Espionage Act and a Sedition Act. In the words of Brogan, "No one who weakened support for 'the boys' in uniform deserved any mercy."[11]

Casual students of American history know Wilson primarily for his

Fourteen Points, the ambitious plan to create a just and lasting peace for the peoples of Europe and, by extension, the United States. It is the last of the fourteen points that best reflects the thinking of modern liberalism: establishment of an association of nations "for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike." Wilson's concept, subsequently known as the League of Nations, would have effectively placed the United States at the head of a "world family" created to solve potential conflicts through peaceful negotiation instead of violence. This utopian ideal has been promoted by liberals and assailed by conservatives ever since it was propounded. In 1920 isolationist Republicans in the Senate were primarily responsible for the vote opposing U.S. participation in the League of Nations.

Some twenty-five years later, another liberal, Franklin Roosevelt, was the prime mover behind the United Nations. By the 1960s, the John Birch Society and other far-right conservatives were urging the United States to get out of the UN on the grounds that it was a nest of communist spies and routinely favored the Reds. Communism's collapse did nothing to modify the hostility of conservatives toward the UN. The administration of George W. Bush, particularly such figures as Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and Ambassador John Bolton, held the organization in contempt and arrogantly challenged its authority. In their opposition to the Iraq war, liberals argued that the United States should have worked more closely with the UN on a strategy to contain if not counter the regime of Saddam Hussein.

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Progressive was not always a euphemism for liberal in American history. In the period from 1895 to 1915, the term was a bona fide political movement. In national politics, progressives are identified primarily with Teddy Roosevelt (president from 1901 through 1908) and Wilson. Much of the progressive agenda was based on curbing the power of Big

Business—railroad companies in particular—"humanizing" the workplace, and protecting consumers.

Among Roosevelt's singular achievements was passage of the Hepburn Act of 1906, which bestowed upon the Interstate Commerce Commission the power to establish minimum and maximum railroad rates. Appalled—and goaded into action—by the publication of Upon Sinclair's novel *The Jungle*, an expose of horribly unsanitary conditions in Chicago's stockyards, Roosevelt lobbied Congress to approve the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act. The latter prohibited the sale of adulterated products in inter-state commerce. An ardent environmentalist, Roosevelt added nearly 150 million acres of open space to the government reserves of 45 million acres. Roosevelt's activism contrasts with the majority of Republican presidents who came after him throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Nonetheless, Republican Senator John McCain (Arizona) considers Roosevelt one of the greatest Republican presidents of all-time, right up there with Ronald Reagan.

The policies and programs of Roosevelt and Wilson helped to fundamentally change the definition of liberalism. During the nineteenth century, classic liberalism advocated free trade and unregulated markets. Subsequently, however, liberals have tended to support the rights of working people and unions when these rights are in conflict with big business. "When I was a young man in college, this nation was engaged in a great liberal crusade," said Wendell Willkie, the 1940 Republican nominee for president, during a speech that year in Toledo, Ohio. "Its leaders were three great Americans—all three very different in personality and background—Theodore Roosevelt [Wisconsin Governor], Robert La Follette, and Woodrow Wilson. Its objective was to free the American people from the excessive power of Big Business."[12] Willkie did not think so highly of his opponent in the 1940 election, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. A Republican criticizes a Democrat for destroying the true spirit of liberalism? To people whose experience with American politics begins with the Reagan presidency that would seem unlikely, if

not impossible. Despite Willkie's objections, FDR thought of himself as liberal, and he regarded the New Deal as a great triumph for liberalism.

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On August 24, 1935, nearing the end of his first term in office, fifty-three-year-old Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave an address to the Young Democratic Clubs of America. As often happens when an elected official speaks to young men and women who are preparing to embark on a life in public service, and have shown an aptitude for politics, the President spoke from his heart about the evolution of his views. In a tone more regretful than apologetic, he confessed to an early ignorance of the connection between "lack of opportunity, lack of education" and both rural and urban poverty. But, in a rebuke to social Darwinist thinking, FDR told his audience that he came to understand that the poor were not born to be poor. It was government that in many cases had failed them, and it was government that could improve their desperate circumstances.

Later in the speech, FDR built upon this idea to offer a definition of New Deal liberalism that is no less relevant today: "The cruel suffering of the recent depression has taught us unforgettable lessons. We have been compelled by stark necessity to unlearn the too comfortable superstition that the American soil was mystically blessed with every kind of immunity to grave economic maladjustments, and that the American spirit of individualism—all alone and unhelped by the cooperative efforts of government—could withstand and repel every form of economic disarrangement or crisis."[13]

Throughout his administration, FDR reminded the American people that his policies and political philosophy were unquestionably liberal. His frequent and proud use of the words *liberal* and *liberalism* was as calculated as the efforts of post-McGovern Democrats to remove those words from political vocabularies. Roosevelt also recognized that some would interpret government intervention in the economy as contradicting the classic notion that authentic liberalism demands a free market economy. As a consequence, he emphasized the idea suggested in

Jefferson's letter near the start of the chapter: the equating of liberalism with progress. "In the coming primaries in all parties," said FDR in a June 24, 1938, Fireside Chat, "there will be many clashes between two schools of thought, generally classified as liberal and conservative. Roughly speaking, the liberal school of thought recognizes that the new conditions throughout the world call for new remedies."[14]

Another important reason that Roosevelt emphasized the quintessentially liberal character of the New Deal was to distinguish the program from communism and socialism, both of which were increasingly popular with American leftists in the 1930s. He wanted the public to be able to locate precisely the New Deal on the ideological spectrum, and not to be confused by propaganda and misinformation from the opposition. After all, in the 1930s conservative Republicans had already initiated the "red-baiting" of liberals and Democrats that would increase exponentially in the years immediately after World War II. Historian John White describes their tactics thus: "In a desperate attempt to regain the White House in 1936, the GOP drew a straight line between the New Deal and communism."[15] It was to counteract these claims that during that same 1938 Fireside Chat, FDR called communism "as dangerous as Fascism," which, with Hitler threatening Europe, was a damning indictment. How could any pro–New Deal leftists support communism after hearing that?

When Roosevelt took office in 1933, the unemployment rate was 25 percent, or some thirteen million workers. Hundreds of banks were failing every year. The Great Depression did not discriminate, affecting Americans of all races, ethnicities, religions, and regions. Over the next five years FDR and a Democratic-led Congress—under the banner of liberalism—approved a series of bills that transformed the relationship between the federal government and the national economy. As an example of liberalism in action, only the Great Society compares to the New Deal in terms of accomplishments. These include the Civilian Conservation Corps (1933); the Glass-Steagall Banking Act (1933), which separated investment from commercial banks and created the

Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation; the Securities and Exchange Commission (1934); the Federal Housing Administration (1934); the Social Security Act (1935); the Farm Security Administration (1937), which maintained migrant labor camps; and the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938), which established a bottom line for wages. By repeatedly linking the New Deal to liberalism, Roosevelt hammered home the idea that only liberalism was capable of both comprehending and aggressively responding to national economic crises. His programs also offered a powerful argument that liberalism represented the future, which was not immediately apparent during the Depression—even to true believing liberals. As Isaiah Berlin notes, "The most insistent propaganda in those days declared that humanism and liberalism were played out, and that the choice now lay between two bleak extremes—Communism and Fascism—the red and the black. To those where not carried away by the patter the only light that was left in the darkness was the administration of [Franklin] Roosevelt and the New Deal in the United States."[16]

The president implied that Americans were very fortunate that liberals held power in the 1930s. The mainstream alternative—pro–Big Business Republicanism—would in his view have condemned the country to an eternity of economic misery and hardship.

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Freedom and progress—the dominant ideas behind liberalism—can coexist, but not always easily. Political correctness and hate speech codes are two modern-day examples: introduced presumably to end discrimination and bigotry, they also limit freedom of expression, which is unacceptable to many liberals. Regarding the economy, there are those who still argue that the New Deal was anathema to the basic principles underlying American capitalism. Employing the kind of buzz phrase that was made popular by Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan, the conservative English historian and journalist Paul Johnson said the Social Security Act "introduced a specific and permanent system of federal welfare."[17] Doctrinaire believers in the free market system regard

the New Deal as the start of the federal government's ever greater control over our economic lives, to the detriment of growth. In this light, even the "little man" is hurt by the excessive burdens placed upon business by tax-happy, regulation-loving liberals in Congress. Conservatives maintain that liberal policies and programs deny U.S. citizens the *freedom* to spend their money as they say see fit.

New Deal liberals would counter that if people cannot find steady work, they are not truly free. Only when they are able to acquire a good job, and provide a degree of financial security for their families, will they achieve this dream. In accord with this principle of economic liberalism, some of these jobs can be made available only through government programs. From this perspective, liberalism does not deny freedom, but guarantees it.

The FDR administration and the New Deal changed the meaning and purpose of American liberalism. To the free-market liberal Wendell Willkie, Roosevelt and his advisors offered a corrupt version of liberalism that placed the cherished ideals of freedom and progress with a new, nefarious, and illiberal institution he christened Big Government. Willkie ran for president on a platform to restore liberalism's good name and to save it from the usurpers. A proliberal critic from the right, Willkie's type is rare in American politics—few contemporary Republicans have anything positive to say about liberalism in the last four decades. Moreover, Willkie's criticisms did not sway many liberals in 1940—FDR was handily elected to a third term—and neither the GOP challenger nor his politics are much remembered today. It is the legacy of FDR's liberalism that endures: liberals and progressives will fight as hard to protect programs introduced during the New Deal, especially Social Security, as they will remnants of the New Frontier and Great Society.

The final five years of the Roosevelt presidency (FDR died in office on April 12, 1945) were devoted to fighting and winning World War II and working with Churchill and Stalin to devise the postwar map for Central and Eastern Europe. The Big Three—beginning at Casablanca in

January 1943 and continuing with Teheran later that year and, finally, Yalta in February 1945—arrived at a series of agreements that left much of Eastern Europe under Soviet control. For many on the American right Yalta became a symbol for liberal capitulation and cowardice in international affairs. They were especially bitter that FDR "sold out" Poland to the Soviets. It was not so simple. Over the past fifty years a number of historians have pointed out that "the most that can be said of the Yalta Conference was that if offers a striking study in misunderstanding, with Roosevelt in particular a victim of his own illusions. For by then Stalin hardly needed permission to do whatever he wished in Eastern Europe, as the British at least understood perfectly well."[18] Not until the liberation of Eastern Europe in 1989 and the end of the Soviet Union two years later was "Yalta" finally retired as a showpiece of antiliberal propaganda in American politics. There would soon be another war to fight, one that had no obvious connection to the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Nonetheless, Yalta had a significant impact on domestic politics in the history of postwar American liberalism. The repercussions of the conference served as an early talking point for right-wing conservatives seeking to exploit Soviet-American tensions for their own political purposes. Forget the reality on the ground; the Right knew what *really* happened at Yalta. And the fact that the American president at the time was a proud, unapologetic liberal allowed conservatives to link this foreign policy "disaster" to liberalism.

In retrospect, what is astonishing about the Right's success at demonizing liberals and their alleged capitulation to communists—foreign and domestic—is that it occurred so soon after the end of a war won by two liberal presidents, Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman. Liberals were an easier target after Vietnam. Beginning in the late 1970s there was a kind of twisted logic to the often inaccurate and biased arguments by conservatives that liberals in Congress and the White House had "lost" Vietnam. In this case, two liberal presidents, Kennedy and Johnson, did not develop a clear and coherent strategy for victory, and

later, the New Left/liberal antiwar movement helped turn public opinion against the war. But that is not the case with World War II. After all, it was Truman who made the decision to drop the atom bomb on two Japanese cities. A number of historians and writers on the left have argued ever since that the president took this action as much to impress the Soviets as to put an end to the war in the Pacific.

It was bad luck for American liberalism, however, that the end of World War II also marked the beginning of the Cold War. Liberals were given no credit for leading the fight against Hitler and the Japanese empire. During the ensuing decade, 1945–55, American liberalism experienced one of the most stress-filled periods in its history. The events of that time can still traumatize liberals of any age, even after the failures of the past quarter century. Low points include: loyalty oaths, the loss of China, the Alger Hiss case, the outlawing of the Communist Party, the rise of Richard Nixon and Joe McCarthy, the outbreak of the Korean War, the detonation of a hydrogen bomb by the Soviet Union, and Adlai Stevenson's back-to-back defeats for the presidency. Liberals were either blamed for—or suffered the consequences from—each of these events. And whereas the New Deal had "saved" the United States, liberals were now accused of handing the country over to the enemy.

Although they were clearly on the defensive, some prominent liberals did not meekly accept their fate during this dark period. In January 1947, a group of them started an organization known as Americans for Democratic Action, or the ADA. The founders included Eleanor Roosevelt, Walter Ruether, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Reinhold Niebuhr, Hubert Humphrey, and John Kenneth Galbraith. While social and economic issues constituted an important part of the ADA's agenda, the organization is best remembered for its staunch anticommunism, described in the following way by the economist and author Richard Parker: "For many of its members, one of the ADA's most important missions was to halt and reverse the influence of domestic communists and fellow traveling radicals on postwar American liberalism."[19]

Within a few years, Humphrey sponsored legislation in the U.S.

Senate making it a crime for federal employees to join the Communist Party. The bill passed with only one dissenting vote. The founding of the ADA represents one of the pivotal moments in the history of an influential subset of liberalism, known as Cold War liberalism. Over the ensuing sixty years, Cold War liberalism has come to stand for those self-proclaimed liberals who believe the United States must be strong and decisive in foreign affairs and harbor no illusions about the nature and ambitions of our enemies—whoever and wherever they are. This version has outlasted the Cold War. Contemporary liberals who believe that the Democratic Party is naive about the threats posed by militant Islam and international terrorism have argued for a return to Cold War liberalism.

Both the existence of the ADA, which was hardly a fringe group, and policies enacted by Harry Truman should have demonstrated to even hard-right conservatives that influential liberals were committed to the fight against communism. Writing four decades later, Paul Johnson offered the view that "Harry Truman proved to be one of the great American presidents."[20] Johnson was enamored of Truman's foreign policy, especially toward the Soviet Union, which the author contrasted favorably both with that of his predecessor and the Democratic commanders-in-chief who came later.

In March 1947, the president proposed what has come to be known as the Truman Doctrine: "I believe it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure." Proposed in response to an immediate crisis in Greece, and the corresponding fear that victory by communist insurgents could lead to a "domino effect" across the Middle East, the Truman Doctrine has been regarded by many as justifying (falsely or not) U.S. involvement in local conflicts around the globe, including Korea, Iran and Guatemala in the 1950s, Cuba and Vietnam in the 1960s, and Chile and Angola in the 1970s. A few months later, Congress approved the National Security Act, which created the CIA and the National Security Council (NSC). These actions, part of an

evolving policy of containment toward the Soviet Union, established the foundations of the postwar American foreign policy state.

As a result of this stance, Truman, though a pro-labor liberal on domestic issues who was the architect of the Fair Deal and a proponent of universal health insurance, has been severely criticized by some on the left. For example, in a brief essay, first published in *The Nation*, commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the Truman Doctrine and the NSC, Gore Vidal wrote: "The fact that the Soviet Union was no military or economic threat to us was immaterial. It must be made to appear threatening so that the continuing plan could be set in motion in order to create that National Security State in which we have been living for the past forty years."[21]

On June 25, 1950, communist North Korea launched an invasion of South Korea. Within two days, Truman, acting under the auspices of the United Nations, pledged U.S. support to the beleaguered country. But it was not simply the fate of the South Korean people that concerned the Truman Administration. As Hugh Brogan wrote, "It was assumed that the North Koreans would never have dared to act without the express authorization of Stalin."[22] In the judgment of American policy-makers, the Korean war was never just about Korea but part of the struggle for worldwide supremacy between the United States and the Soviet Union. From Truman through Johnson, one of the hallmarks of Cold War liberalism is the consideration of local or regional conflicts in larger terms. For example, it would have been absurd to regard Ho Chi Minh alone as a grave threat to the United States, one of the world's two superpowers. But if Ho Chi Minh is portrayed as the tool of the Soviet Union and China, then the war in Vietnam takes on a different meaning. We must fight them there in order not to fight them here.

Still, Cold War liberals remained bona fide liberals on domestic issues. At the 1948 Democratic Convention, Minneapolis Mayor Hubert Humphrey proposed a far-reaching civil rights platform that was to the left of even Truman. And yet a few years later Humphrey, by then a Senator from Minnesota, introduced his bill to make it illegal for federal

employees to be members of the Communist Party. This combination of an aggressive left-liberalism on domestic matters and a bellicose attitude toward communism distinguishes Cold War liberals from their foreign policy progeny, the neoconservatives of the 1970s and 1980s. The neocons, as they came to be known, openly abhorred components of the liberal agenda involving race and government assistance, specifically quotas and the Aid to Dependent Children act. Their support for Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign in 1980 stemmed from his conservative positions on foreign *and* domestic issues. It was only several years later, after the Republican Party had been captured by the Christian right, that neoconservatives criticized liberals almost exclusively for their positions on foreign policy. Many of the leading neocons were Jewish, and they were as discomforted as liberals by antiabortion laws, prayer in schools, and edicts that condemned gay people to hell.

The combination of President Truman's foreign policy—he also presided over the founding of NATO—and the invention of Cold War liberalism should have given liberals unimpeachable credentials in the battle against world communism, even during the darkest days of the Cold War. Furthermore, liberals in the early and mid-1950s were willing to compromise their ideals if it meant being left alone. "Many liberals acquiesced in the suppression of dissent. Some were scared of being caught up in the mania themselves and joined the mob lest it turn on them. Others were concerned that the handful of Soviet sympathizers in America were a great enough menace to warrant extreme action."[23]

Looking back, the surrender of liberals over civil liberties issues is shameful, in part because it did absolutely nothing to impress the other side. Nixon, McCarthy, and like-minded conservatives were determined to equate liberals with Communism and treason, regardless of evidence offered to the contrary. If the Democrats moved to the right on issues of national security, their Republican antagonists would simply move further to the right. For example, not even masochistic, self-hating liberals joined McCarthy in his quest to prove that the U.S. Army was riddled with communist spies.

It is an axiom of American politics since the end of World War II that Democrats cannot win a patriotism contest against the GOP. Whether the enemy resides in Moscow, Beijing, or in caves somewhere along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, conservatives in this country are unrestrained on matters of national security. They have owned" patriotism since 1945, and they will say anything to prevent liberals—Cold War or antiwar—from claiming even one inch of Old Glory.

Nonetheless, Cold War liberalism and Truman's aggressive anticommunism enabled liberals to pursue a strong foreign policy without sacrificing their fundamental beliefs. Liberals are not communists, and there was nothing wrong with making that point abundantly clear to the American masses. Furthermore, Cold War liberalism permitted one to remain a liberal without harboring any warm and fuzzy illusions about the nature of the Soviet threat.

However, in the 1960s and 1970s, as liberalism moved further left, some of the early Cold War liberals staged a noisy exit from the Democratic Party. They came to the conclusion that their brand of liberalism was incompatible with the Gene McCarthy-George McGovern-Tom Hayden variant. The advent of black power, feminism, gay rights, and, most of all, a foreign policy that demanded an immediate withdrawal from Vietnam, that valued negotiation over confrontation and human rights over ideology, and that called for reductions in the defense budget, pushed Cold War liberals and their neoconservative offspring to quit the party of Roosevelt, Truman, and JFK and to join the GOP. They did not stop there. They accused the new liberals of rooting against America, a charge that is revived with every conflict. It is a measure of the U.S. failure in Iraq that for the first time since the 1972 McGovern campaign Democrats could run and win on an antiwar platform. Both the Democratic takeover of the House and Senate in 2006 and the 2008 Democratic presidential primary reflect the sense that there are political advantages in opposing "Bush's war."

Still, younger Democrats who know McGovern mainly as the guy who got clobbered by Nixon are calling for the return of Cold War lib-

eralism. They worry about the party's enduring "peace now" image and its association with weakness and failure in international relations. They concede that Iraq is now a disaster—many of them originally supported the war—but they are concerned that liberals and progressives will draw the wrong conclusions for U.S. policy in the future. This debate will continue long after the troops have returned home.

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Whether extolling the virtues of individualism or protecting our way of life from totalitarianism, liberal thinkers and liberal politicians since Locke have embraced the ideas of freedom and progress. By the same token, fealty to these ideas provides a standard for assessing the credibility and efficacy of liberalism at any particular period in history. When liberalism no longer represents freedom and progress—Wendell Willkie argued that the FDR version sacrificed the former—then it does not meet the test of liberalism in the American tradition. Given these criteria, one of the key questions to be examined in this book is whether the decline of liberalism since the late 1960s was principally the result of a self-inflicted wound. Did liberals lose faith in liberalism?