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Hartz and Minds: *The Liberal Tradition* after the Cold War

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The Liberal Tradition in America is truly an exceptional book. Its conceptual framework has been widely criticized as wrongheaded, and each of its organizing theses has been held to be historically inaccurate. Nonetheless, it continues to figure as a central text for scholars in political studies and American studies. We teach it regularly in graduate seminars, allow the problems it raises to shape our research agendas, and organize symposia to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of its publication. Indeed, it is tempting to suggest that, if nothing else, Louis Hartz long ago proved that it is more desirable to be interesting than to be right. To that end, I write here to register an appreciation of his work even as I acknowledge the aptness of much of the criticism to which it has been subjected. To my mind, a Hartz who has been refined and reframed by decades of criticism can still offer valuable insight into America and America's engagement with the world, particularly in a moment of caustic political and sharp economic divisions that would seem to belie the consensus he emphasized, and in the midst of the emergence of forthrightly illiberal doctrines shaping both American domestic and foreign policy.

HARTZ'S LIBERAL TENSIONS

Hartz's work assailed, even as it brought theoretical sophistication to, what he called the "storybook truth about American history," that American politics is shaped by a continuous tradition of Lockean liberalism.[1] Settled as a place of escape from the religious, political, and social dogmas of the Old World, America's most unique and fundamental historical feature, as Hartz saw it, is defined by an absence, or more precisely, by three related absences: lacking the constitutive ground of feudalism, with its strict – and strictly fixed – structures of wealth and authority, America failed to develop both a genuinely revolutionary tradition and a genuinely conservative defense of the old order. American politics and American history are thus structured, he argued, not primarily by class conflict but by political struggles conducted for the most part against a background of shared commitment to liberal values and institutions. But for all of the apparent social pliability, for all of the formal liberty and equality bequeathed by America's distinctive development, the legacy of American liberalism is not more freedom, Hartz contended, but less. In the United States, the "fixed dogmatic liberalism of a liberal way of life" (9) produces a cult of liberal constitutionalism, a language of political rights that exerts an unshakable hold over the American political imagination, a tyranny of unanimity by which nominally democratic processes achieve the suppression of free thought, free speech, and free action with a dispatch and thoroughness that eluded centuries of European despots and Divine Right absolutists. What most animates Hartz's book, then, is its apprehension of a paradox at the heart of American politics: liberal freedom is most imperiled not by external adversaries, but by liberalism's own internal logic, and the most serious dangers posed to the storybook American nation are generated by the historical one.

The Liberal Tradition in America was written in the midst of some of the worst excesses of the Cold War, as American political culture was dominated by perceived threats from communist states abroad and communist infiltrators and sympathizers within. However, for Hartz, the attenuation of political and intellectual freedom under McCarthyism was not so much an aberration as an emblem of the develop-

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1. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955; New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1991), 3. In-text page citations hereafter refer to this edition.

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ment of liberalism in the United States, a logical consequence of an American culture of unanimity and consensus. In reviewing recurrent efforts since the founding to develop alternative political currents, Hartz argued that with few exceptions these efforts failed to gain purchase in a national imagination shaped so powerfully by the temper of a Locke understood without reference to a prior Filmer. McCarthy found precedent in A. Mitchell Palmer; and in the wake of WWI, the Russian Revolution, and incipient Soviet expansionism, this absence of an effective tradition of dissent had the consequence "of projecting the limitations of the American liberal perspective onto the world scene and at the same time, by generating the national moral passion, striking hard at the lone dissenting spirit" at home (293).

The Cold War is over, and while the political intolerance that characterized that era is well documented, might we now, with the benefit of hindsight, see in *The Liberal Tradition in America* a thesis born of an exceptionally illiberal moment, a pessimistic projection onto liberalism of undemocratic elements extrinsic to it?[2] In fact, one of the primary challenges to Hartz comes from scholars who find in American political development not a monolithic consensus over liberal ideals, but a more variegated ensemble of sometimes complimentary and sometimes competing traditions that shape both civic activity and political thought in the United States. Scholars such as John Pocock, for example, have demonstrated America's involvement in a vibrant transatlantic republican tradition, and Paul Gilroy has expanded that transatlantic influence to include strands of African and Caribbean thought.[3] Most recently, Rogers Smith's "multiple traditions" approach has argued persuasively that the American political tradition is a complex mix of liberalism, republicanism, and what he calls "ascriptive Americanisms," decidedly illiberal and inegalitarian doctrines of racial, ethnic, and gendered supremacy.[4]

Perhaps more damning are the challenges to Hartz's central assumption that American political development proceeds in the absence of feudalism. For Sheldon Wolin, the American Revolution was a revolt against the distant, centralized, and rationalizing authority of the British administration in favor of more local and polycentric modes of governance; in this respect, it was a feudal revolution, even if it lacked conventional markers of feudal social organization, such as a system of land tenure or a regime of inherited privilege and social status. This distinctively American feudal order was quickly overthrown by the liberal revolution of the 1787 Constitution, which recentralized political authority in the federal state;[5] yet as Wolin also contends and work by Karen Orren and Linda Kerber confirms, even the liberal revolution of 1787 did not fully eliminate the residue of feudalism from American institutions. For Orren, American labor law retained important traces of English Tudor, even Plantagenet, conceptions of the law of master and servant at least through the Gilded Age.[6] Similarly, Linda Kerber has chronicled the adaptation of the English common law idea of coverture (which initially encompassed relations between fathers and children, and between masters and servants) to include relations between husbands and wives. For Kerber, these elements survive well into the nineteenth century in American marriage law and, even today, remain embedded in customary practices.[7]

I raise both sets of criticism here because I regard them as especially well-founded correctives of the historical record. Together, they allow us to tell a different story about American political development, one in which a distinctly American form of feudal politics was overthrown by a liberal revolution that nonethe-

2. See Robert N. Bellah, "McCarthyism at Harvard," *The New York Review of Books,* 52 (2005): 42–43; Andrew D. Grossman, *Neither Dead Nor Red: Civilian Defense and American Political Development During the Early Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Noam Chomsky, Ira Katznelson, et al., *The Cold War and the University: Toward an Intellectual History of the Postwar Years* (New York: The New Press, 1997); Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

3. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

4. Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997). To those familiar with the debate about the putatively liberal origins of American political thought, it will be immediately evident that I have collapsed an extensive discussion into very brief compass here, siding ultimately with those who see in American thought a complex and sometimes inconsistent synthesis of multiple traditions. For a more complete grasp of the range of, and distinctive positions in, this debate, see Michael Lienesch, *New Order of the Ages: Time, the Constitution, and the Making of Modern American Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988). For those who, along with Hartz, tend to view the American tradition as dominated by liberalism, see: Isaac Kramnick, "Republican Revisionism Revisited," *American Historical Review* 87 (1982): 629–64; Joyce Appleby, "The Social Origins of American Revolutionary Ideology," *Journal of American History* 64 (1978): 935–58; Michael P. Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Joshua Foa Dienstag, "Between History and Nature: Social Contract Theory in Locke and the Founders," *Journal of Politics* 58 (1996): 985–1000. For those who view the thought of the founding generation as predominantly republican, see: Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1067); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

5. Sheldon S. Wolin, *The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

6. Karen Orren, *Belated Feudalism: Labor, the Law, and Liberal Development in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

7. Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

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less remains partial and incomplete. In this reading, the American political tradition contains elements other than liberalism, and liberalism itself incorporates nonliberal and even illiberal conventions. However, while I fully accept these correctives, I am also concerned about a tendency to overread their consequences and thus to dismiss Hartz's work as historically reductive and analytically static. I fear that we might miss the opportunity for a sustained consideration of precisely what I find most valuable in Hartz's book, namely his identification of a series of tensions at work *within* American liberalism.

These overreadings take two forms. The first, while documenting the complex mix of political forces at work in America, tends to portray Hartzian liberalism as a unified, unitary tradition. In emphasizing the degree to which other traditions have operated alongside of and in competition with American liberalism, there is a tendency to displace much that is dissonant or problematic within liberal thought onto these other traditions. This has the curious effect of portraying American liberalism as more singular and unitary than Hartz would have allowed. While he argues forthrightly that America lacks both a revolutionary-socialist tradition and a reactionary-conservative one, his view of liberalism suggests a far more internally fraught complex than is generally acknowledged, and one that is itself implicated in decidedly illiberal institutional practices.[8]

The second tendency to overread concerns Hartz's central assumption about the absence of feudalism in America. His contention that "liberalism at the outset explains liberalism thereafter"[9] does indeed imply a largely static view of history. Let me suggest, however, that if Hartz is wrong about American history, he might nonetheless be right about American politics, or at least about something that is central to the way we think about politics in America, where exceptionalist claims continue to shape both a language of politics and the disciplinary structure of American political science. Read this way, Hartz's case for American exceptionalism both identifies a foundational fiction at work in America and is itself caught up in that fiction. However, where the assertion of American exceptionalism as historical fact does seem to militate against a developmental approach to the study or conduct of politics, the deployment of American exceptionalism as a fiction within American history is a powerful – and, I would argue, a powerfully dynamic – force.

The embrace of pastlessness, the fiction of a self-made people, figures importantly throughout the history of American political thought. It works to tie Americans to one another while simultaneously distinguishing them from the rest of the world. It is a fiction that enabled Jefferson, in *Notes on the State of Virginia,* to articulate a democratic national vision framed entirely through reference to the peoples and natural resources of the New World. It is also what Tocqueville discerned at work when he characterized Americans as a people who "have no school of philosophy peculiar to themselves, and [who] pay very little attention to the rival European schools. Indeed, they hardly know their names." But if Americans were formally unschooled in the history of philosophy, "almost all have a uniform method and rules for the conduct of intellectual inquiries." They "have needed no books to teach them philosophic method, having found it in themselves," and they are continually brought back to their own judgment and their own experience as the "most apparent and accessible test of truth."[10] For Tocqueville, these acts of philosophic-political self creation form both the ground of personal judgment and the foundation of American nationalism.

This philosophic independence has the salutary effect of democratizing political thinking, Tocqueville suggests. Americans take public questions seriously and experience politics as personally empowering. Yet at the same time, pastlessness is the source of reaction and self-enclosure – it can lock Americans into the narrow perspective of a limited and self-limiting history. The very practices that empower also mean that Americans are "easily led to the conclusion that everything in the world can be explained" by reference to themselves, "each man is narrowly shut up in himself, and from that basis makes the pretension to judge the world."[11] Moreover, a nationalism premised on the embrace of pastlessness enables Americans not simply to neglect the past, but also to imagine new pasts tailored to the needs of the present, as, for example, when Jefferson developed his fabulous fiction of kinship with Native Americans that helped to justify colonists' claims on the land as inheritance, while also pointedly excluding African (American) slaves from the nation and justifying their colonization elsewhere.[12]

To put this in slightly different terms, the claim of autochthony, of self-making, that figures so powerfully in American thought is never really an historical claim. On the contrary, it entails the elision and even the erasure of history. But this pastlessness is nonetheless a powerful *political* claim and thus a powerful historical force, and a close reading of Hartz reveals

8. I have argued many of these points in greater detail elsewhere. See Catherine A. Holland, *The Body Politic: Foundings, Citizenship, and Difference in the American Political Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2001), esp. xv–xxi.

9. This is Orren's formulation of Hartz's thesis. See Orren, *Belated Feudalism*, 1.

10. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Perennial Classics, 2000), 429–30.

11. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 429–30.

12. For a more detailed account of this argument by reference to Jefferson, see Catherine A. Holland, "Notes on the State of America: Jeffersonian Democracy and the Production of a National Past," *Political Theory* 29 (2001): 190–216; in terms of American political thought more generally, see Holland, *The Body Politic.*

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the degree to which America's embrace of pastlessness constitutes a dynamic principle at work within the American liberal tradition. It is the source of democratic innovation and a goad to share that innovation with the world. It is also the source of liberal reaction and self-enclosure, and expresses itself in tendencies toward isolationism, on one hand, and expansionism on the other. And it is precisely this dynamic interplay between excursions into the world and retreat from it that Hartz chronicles in *The Liberal Tradition in America*. Far from a static analysis then, I would argue that the constitutive tensions at the heart of American liberalism effect what Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek have called "institutional intercurrence": that is, they are occasions for the collision and the collusion of competing modes of political authority, the abrasion of extant standards of legitimacy, and the genesis of new political forms freighted with the weight of the past.[13] Read this way, Hartz's "liberal tradition" might be viewed not as a single ordering principle that unifies American political thought, but instead as a complex mix of ideas, institutions, and practices that are as often at odds with one another as they are in harmony. In this respect, his analysis always points to the dynamic possibilities within the liberal tradition, possibilities which work themselves out on the ground of history.

Throughout the pages of *The Liberal Tradition in America,* Hartz employs a series of metaphoric dyads in an attempt to capture the dynamics of pastlessness in particular historical moments. Two of these seem especially useful in reconsidering the liberal tradition in light of recent developments in American public life. The first tension lies between what Hartz calls America's "curiously Hebraic kind of separatism" and its "Christian universalism," a recurring rift in America's disposition in and toward the world. American separatism – its "Hebraic" mode – figures as a "pride of inheritance," making political capital of the nation's putatively nonfeudal origins by viewing Americans as a chosen people destined to live out an historic experiment with organic democracy (37). Such a worldview positions Americans as singular, suggests that democracy is a gift bestowed on them by fortune rather than an achievement, and tends to result in an isolationist foreign policy designed to protect America from contamination by the world outside its borders. Yet this tendency coexists alongside another, what Hartz calls "Christian universalism," which views the liberal tradition as Americans' proud gift to the world and fosters the missionary desire to share that inheritance, to export the "American way of life" and its institutions in order to remake the world in America's image. Both tendencies expressed themselves early on. They warred against one another in the "cosmopolitan mind of Jefferson" (37), for example, and in the dispute between Harding and Wilson over the League of Nations, and they help to explain America's ambivalent internationalism, alternately "fleeing from the rest of the world and embracing it with too ardent a passion" (286).

The second of these tensions is less internal to liberalism per se than it is a product of liberalism's embrace of capitalism after the Civil War. Here, pastlessness is figured both as freedom from one's personal past, as embodied in the ideal of individual self-making, and as a profound presentism that in denying Americans a past also limits their alternatives in the present. This brand of Americanism, Hartz argues, takes hold through the twin metaphors of "charm" and "terror" (203–10), and it works as a disciplinary tactic to produce a liberalism that is aggressively capitalist. Its charm is embodied in Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches tales, which promised the possibility of wealth to even the most destitute of Americans, and shaped the national imagination through capitalist desire by holding out the vision of a future in which capitalist success was every citizen's highest aspiration. Indeed, the disciplinary power of charm rendered the virtues of capitalism so powerful that they came to dominate the vision even of those who looked around them and found reason to question the Algerist dream as little more than a fairy tale.

This is where terror comes in. For Hartz, terror is both the extrapolitical violence that all states hold in reserve and the power to define the boundaries of the political itself. Furthermore, terror is the common term that links charges levied against anticapitalist dissenters as un-American with those levelled at trust-busting Progressives, who sought not to overthrow capitalism but to extend the Algerist dream to the masses. Where charm failed, terror worked "to frighten the American democrat with his own absolute liberalism, [and] tried to precipitate . . . an internal moral crisis whenever he turned to the instrument of the state" for redress against America's violations of Americanism itself (208). The twin tactics of charm and terror combined forces to reabsorb dissent and produce a liberalism that could accommodate extreme economic inequality while engendering successive waves of anticommunist hysteria in moments of unprecedented prosperity, when capitalism would otherwise appear to have its strongest hold on America and communist overthrow seemed least likely.

Among the many tensions that Hartz identifies at work in shaping American liberalism, I single out these two for mention precisely because, while they emerge undeniably in distinct historical moments, they are by no means fully contained within those moments, but instead figure in altered form repeat-

13. Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, "The Study of American Political Development," *Political Science: State of the Discipline*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), esp. 747–51; see also Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for Political Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. 108–18; Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, "Institutions and Intercurrence: Theory Building in the Fullness of Time," *Nomos* 38 (1996): 111–46.

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edly throughout the course of American political development. Both shaped the Cold War context in which Hartz composed his work. More to the point, both languages survive the end of the Cold War to do their work on the contemporary scene. In this respect, consider a variety of recent domestic initiatives: efforts to desecularize public institutions by funding "faith-based" providers of social services and parochial school voucher programs; the fundamental reshaping of public institutions in ways that render citizens irrelevant and citizen action meaningless, at best, or even a liability to the efficient functioning of government, at worst;[14] efforts to amend both federal and state constitutions to deny a basic form of social status – marriage – and its attendant social and economic benefits to specific groups of citizens; and provisions of the Patriot Act that allow the state to keep track of citizens' reading habits, among other things. Initiatives like these surely prompt us to question the nation's commitment to such foundational liberal principles as (first) secular government that relies on (second) active citizens of (third) equal standing guaranteed (fourth) rights of political-intellectual inquiry and dissent free of intimidation and/or regulation by the state. Consider also the new (American) international doctrines of preemptive and elective war, targeted assassination, coercive interrogation, and the indefinite imprisonment without legal counsel or judicial oversight of a new category of persons classified as "enemy combatants" – all of which call into question the nation's respect for the Lockean rule of law and for international human rights conventions developed by virtue of a long-standing tradition of liberal internationalism.

On the face of it, these practices are forthrightly illiberal. However, let us also consider the terms in which they are frequently justified. For example, in the backlash against the legalization of same sex marriage in Massachusetts, it is a distinctly Hartzian notion of charm and terror that sustains efforts made by advocates of state and federal constitutional amendments to define marriage as explicitly and exclusively a heterosexual institution. Here, heterosexual marriage figures as an Algerist fantasy of familial happiness and prosperity, undergirded by warnings that the expansion of marriage beyond conventional boundaries would render it altogether meaningless and undermine the well-being of an entire nation.[15] In this instance, we can see a paradox at the heart of American liberalism, where a progressive demand that America live up to its liberal heritage by extending institutional benefits to those previously excluded from them is thwarted by the desire to protect established institutions from contamination, to fix in every present the inheritance of a past that is asserted to be changeless and unchangeable. When and where such amendments are approved, an institution that was once customarily exclusionary is made constitutionally so, and is respositioned as an unalterable foundation of public happiness and collective prosperity.

The tension between messianism and isolationism is also very much present in the aftermath of the Cold War. While the messianic extreme of the Bush doctrine of preemptive war has, in recent years, tended to drown out its isolationist counterpart, throughout the 2004 election, we heard a building chorus of whispers that questioned why so much public funding was being devoted to rebuilding Iraq while our own infrastructure crumbles at home. This was the theme of a series of television commercials aired in swing states by the liberal advocacy group, MoveOn.[16] More to the point however, for Hartz, it is not so much the oscillation between these poles that characterizes American liberalism, but the unconscious joining of both in a curious, seemingly self-contradictory, and internally complex tradition.

In a more general sense, these arguably illiberal initiatives are of a piece with the liberal tradition that they challenge to the degree that their proponents embrace conventional modes and standards of Americanism itself. If the public funding of religious schools and social services would seem to collapse the separation of church and state, advocates of these measures appeal to constitutional guarantees of the free exercise of religion. If the use of constitutional amendments to define marriage and prohibit entire classes of people from marrying one another would seem to introduce unconstitutionally discriminatory practices into the constitution, advocates remind us that the process of ratification relies on the authority of popular sovereignty and the equal right of all citizens to participate in it, an affirmation rather than a violation of constitutional principle at its most fundamental.

If I am anywhere close to being right about the ways in which these recent initiatives represent less a departure from the liberal tradition than a new development within it, despair might well be in order.[17] But despair all too frequently breeds retreat into nostalgia, in this case perhaps nostalgia for the welfare state of the New Deal, or even for its Cold War counterpart, which, after all, met the perceived Soviet threat at least in part by developing novel institution-

14. See Matthew A. Crenson and Benjamin Ginsburg, *Downsizing Democracy: How America Sidelined Its Citizens and Privatized Its Public* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

15. See Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).

16. See Philip Gourevitch, "Campaign Journal: Swingtime," *The New Yorker*, 23 Aug. 2004, 34–39.

17. Despair is in fact the term that John Patrick Diggins has applied to Hartz himself, whom Diggins describes as having left Harvard, like Henry Adams, "convinced that what he knew about his subject was perhaps more than any American could bear." John Patrick Diggins, "Knowledge and Sorrow: Louis Hartz's Quarrel with American History," *Political Theory* 16 (1988): 355.

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al means of promoting new forms of knowledge about America and the world beyond its borders. However, is it impossible to recuperate the past. More to the point, nostalgia too frequently works to tighten, not to loosen, the binds of tradition. While tradition can serve as an important vehicle by which we engage an otherwise vast and formless past, it can also fetter us to what Arendt called a "predetermined aspect of th[at] past," blinding us to the countercurrents and ever-present possibilities within it.[18] And indeed, there is a strand of scholarship on Hartz that, by treating *The Liberal Tradition in America* both as a celebration of American liberalism and as the quintessential expression of American exceptionalism, primes us not to see or hear something that is very much present throughout Hartz's work.[19] To this point, I have portrayed Hartz's understanding of the liberal tradition as one propelled by the dynamic of a perceived pastlessness. In what follows, I want to supplement that reading with another one taken up in the book's final chapter, "America and the World." What I have not yet discussed is the way in which Hartz's work – even his most "American" book – imagines and even relies upon the world as a space of creative possibility.

AMERICA AND THE WORLD

"The most powerful force working to shatter the American absolutism," Hartz wrote, "is, paradoxically enough, the very international involvement which tensifies it" (13). While there is considerable scholarship that recognizes the worldly engagement central to Hartz's work, this tends to be produced by comparativists, not so much by those of us who in one way or another focus on American politics. In fact, *The Liberal Tradition in America* makes its case through explicit and sustained comparisons of American history with that of other nations.[20] This mode of engaging his subject matter comparatively and internationally was, I would argue, Hartz's way of inhabiting a liberal tradition creatively and productively, exploiting its internal expansiveness against its tendency toward self-affirming (en)closure. "The larger forces working toward a shattering of American provincialism abroad as well as at home lie of course in the world scene itself," he wrote (308).

> Will the insight of a Willkie or a Stevenson offset the end of insight a McCarthy inspires? There is nothing in an analysis of American history which gives us a final answer to this question . . . But surely, whatever the outcome, this is the largest challenge the American liberal world has faced, and the payment for meeting it effectively is more than mere survival in an age of world turmoil. It holds out the hope of an inward enrichment of culture and perspective . . . which in its own right is well worth fighting for. What is at stake is nothing less than a new level of consciousness . . . in which an understanding of self and an understanding of others go hand in hand. Nor can one omit the large consequence for the whole free world which this would involve. For if America is the bizarre fulfillment of liberalism, do not people everywhere rely upon it for the retention of what is best in that tradition? (308)

However, if students of American politics have to some degree failed to recognize the ways in which the world inhabits Hartz's work, there is good reason for this, for Hartz himself did not fully grasp the degree to which American history and American thought had always been shaped by the world – hence his failure to recognize the operation of both feudal traces and multiple traditions in America. Going beyond Hartz, chronicling the working of world history, world politics, and world culture *within* the American tradition allows us to see how Hartz's projected way out of the liberal dilemma, of exploiting the openings created by the world's influence, has always been a possibility. In fact, it is through liberalism's engagement with a complex and heterogeneous mix of institutional structures and traditions within America that American history is forged. Which is, of course, to say that liberalism itself is a force in history, one of many currents that shape American political development.

18. Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority," *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (1954; New York: Penguin, 1987), esp. 93–95.

19. For example, there is an important literature that appropriates *The Liberal Tradition in America* as a seminal work of American nationalism, an expression of the very "Americanism" of which Hartz was critical. With the demise of the Cold War, *The Liberal Tradition in America* came to be cited, conversationally if not much in formal scholarship, as a prophetic work that explained the triumph of American liberalism over Soviet-style communism. In a somewhat different vein but by way of a similarly problematic reading of *The Liberal Tradition in America,* scholars seeking to reform the field of American Studies to break up and break from the consensus tradition have construed Hartz's work as a troublesome example of rather than a critical engagement with liberal domination and imposed consensus. See, for example, David W. Noble, *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); also, Donald E. Pease, "C.L.R. James, *Moby-Dick*, and the Emergence of Transnational American Studies," *The Futures of American Studies*, ed. Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), esp. 142.

20. This tendency to range widely across world history was central to Hartz's teaching as well as his writing. In his introduction to *The Necessity of Choice*, Paul Roazen tells of his undergraduate experience in Hartz's course entitled "American and British Political Thought." Hartz began the course by announcing that the most creative strand of American political thought came out of the antebellum South. He then moved on almost immediately to discuss several nineteenth-century British thinkers, "but throughout the course," Roazen writes, Hartz "was more preoccupied with France, and also with socialism, than with anything explicitly to do with the incomprehensible book [*The Liberal Tradition in America*] that had brought me to his class in the first place." See Louis Hartz, *The Necessity of Choice: Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. and comp. Paul Roazen (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 3.

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Grasping this is especially critical in the aftermath of the Cold War, as the American state is remade as a global state, threatening once again to elevate the self-enclosure of American pastlessness to a global ideal. As processes of globalization proceed, however, not only is the national state reconfigured, but new forms of public interest, new kinds of public-minded citizens, and new practices and fora of democratic engagement are generated throughout America and the world. Whether we are talking about women and men who organize to contest political-religious fundamentalisms of all varieties, migrants and refugees who seek meaningful ways of speaking and acting politically in nations in which they may not be citizens, workers who expect fair treatment from global corporations that are bound by no national laws or regulations, or global networks of indigenous peoples challenging the national state's claims upon them, to name only a few, what we see building in momentum throughout the world is a variety of sub- and supranational actors engaged in transnational processes and movements. The common term in the midst of these sub-, trans-, and supraentities and movements is the national, which is neither abandoned nor transcended but is repositioned as the initial point of access by which citizens engage the world both beyond and within the nation's borders. As the late Gloria Anzaldúa pointed out, national borders are not only lines of separation but also zones of connection, frontiers where new understandings of what lies within a nation and what without are forged, and where national identifications and national distinctions are relied upon, where they come unbalanced, and where they might also be remade.[21]

This means that engaging the global does not require discarding, abandoning, or as Hartz put it, transcending the national, so much as rethinking it as a relay between points in a complex political force field. More specifically in terms of American politics, it means asking how Americanism might be rethought and reworked from the inside out, so to speak, starting this time from an appreciation of America's *un*exceptional status as a product of world history, and its incorporation of many traditions – democratic and undemocratic, liberal and illiberal, heroic and undistinguished. And from this perspective, it may be that there are new political ends to which the dynamic of pastlessness might be directed. For if we acknowledge its historical force as a political claim, even given its inaccuracy as an analytic tool, pastlessness might be reinhabited as a means of liberating ourselves from the self-enclosed and self-limiting tendencies of the Americanism that Hartz documented, from those that tie us to a limited and parochial sense of history and to reified institutional arrangements that, because they appear to represent American tradition, seemingly must remain forever unaltered. Indeed, by rejecting its a- or even antihistorical refusal of social power in favor of individual initiative, pastlessness might be turned to the mobilization of new forms of national and transnational political identification and action that work to shape visions not of an exceptionalist, nationalist past, but of a shared world future, and the global-American state remade as a democratic, open, and dynamic one.

None of this will happen easily, and might not happen at all, and indeed, we will no doubt encounter new and as yet unimaginable political perils as we work to innovate within tradition. In Hartz's words,

> we have been able to dream of ourselves as emancipators of the world at the very moment we have withdrawn from it. We have been able to see ourselves as saviors at the very moment we have been isolationists. Here, surely, is one of the great American luxuries that the twentieth century has destroyed. (38)

For Hartz, the wave of (liberal) reaction and repression that characterized American politics during the era in which he wrote was not so much the hidden truth of Americanism as, at once, its proximate cause and the reason why liberal dispositions were so necessary. If he offered a critique of the liberal tradition in America, he did so, arguably, out of a sense of commitment to it, a commitment that draws upon its most emancipatory aspects so that they might be deepened, while also confronting its most troubling attributes so that they might be transformed.

21. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: aunt lute, 1987).

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