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Inventing Un-America

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No writer is more closely bound up with our deepest sense of the meaning of the "American" than Thomas Jefferson and it is difficult to imagine America's national purpose without some reference to his words. Yet Jefferson's projection of American identity also assumed and even constituted, of necessity, the un-American and it is in this sense that the un-American provided the necessary contours of what became the "American." Jefferson's various projects are often seen in tension with one another. But this dialectic between the American and the un-American helps reconcile many of them. Federalists, Jefferson believed, assumed that governing Americans demanded the force and corruption that had long kept Europeans in order, whereas Americans, he believed, had an experience of history that rendered them capable of transcending such political theory and practicing democratic politics. This paper explores this dialectic between the American and the un-American in Jefferson's thought as a problem of national self-definition and argues that Jefferson's overwhelming confidence about American identity rested to a large degree in the shudder produced by his experience of the other. Years before Joseph McCarthy and HUAC, Jefferson's project of defining the nation created the un-American, rendering Americans ever since profoundly, however paradoxically, ambivalent about the prospects for revolutionary republicanism abroad.

I

In a now classic essay from the 1980s, Philip Gleason identified World War II as one of the central points of origin for the discipline of American studies precisely because the war encouraged – if not compelled – a self-consciousness about the distinctiveness of American character in a world hostile to its ostensible values.[1] But Americans have been doing American studies from the beginning and it seems appropriate to begin our discussion of the "un-American" in 1776, at that constitutive moment when Jefferson began what would prove to be his most enduring piece of writing with a differentiation of peoples. "One people" (or, as he put it in his initial draft, "a people"), he said,

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[1] Philip Gleason, "World War Two and the Development of American Studies," *American Quarterly*, 36 (1984) 343–58.

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was ending its previous connection with another.[2] Americans would climb "the road to glory & happiness . . . in a separate state."[3] "By our separation from Great-Britain," he explained later, "British subjects became aliens" in America.[4] So the crisis that led to Revolution created two peoples and there could be "no middle character" between them: "natural subjects" of the crown simply could not be "American citizens" who had become "aliens" to that very crown.[5] In this reading, the Declaration was the genesis of American nationhood as well as the "fundamental act of union of these states," as Jefferson later characterized it.[6] Among other things, Jefferson's Declaration tells what Rogers Smith calls an "ethically constitutive story" – a narrative of "moral affirmation" of American peoplehood.[7] And, as any ethically constitutive story does, this one establishes boundaries and exclusions. In this sense, then, Jefferson's Declaration, whatever else it was doing, also invented the un-American and inaugurated what has become a long-standing American tradition of sorting out friend from foe on the basis of adherence to the story Jefferson told in 1776.

II

Jefferson's own later discussion of the Declaration tended to emphasize this facet of its significance in American life over its legal argument in international law.[8] All Jefferson claimed to have done in the Declaration was

[2] See Peter S. Onuf, "A Declaration of Independence for Diplomatic Historians," *Diplomatic History*, 22 (1998), 71–83. Also see J. G. A. Pocock, "America's Foundations, Foundationalisms, and Fundamentalisms," *Orbis*, 48 (Winter 2004), 37–44, 39; and Pocock, "States, Republics, and Empires: The American Founding in Early Modern Perspective," in Terence Ball, ed., *Conceptual Change and the Constitution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 55–77.

[3] Jefferson's "original rough draught" of the Declaration, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950–) (hereafter *PTJ*), Volume I, 427. In a later fragment, Jefferson changed the phrase "in a separate state" to "apart from them." See "Fragment of the Composition Draft of the Declaration of Independence," in ibid., 421. Congress adopted neither.

[4] Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 155.

[5] Jefferson, *Notes on British and American Alienage* (1783), in *PTJ*, Volume VI, 433.

[6] Minutes of the Board of Visitors, University of Virginia, 1822–25, 4 March 1825, in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984) (hereafter *TJW*), 479.

[7] Rogers Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Also see David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 35–46.

[8] See David Armitage, "The Declaration of Independence and International Law," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 59 (Jan. 2002), 39–64; and Wills, *Inventing America*.

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to express the "American mind."[9] They were words, he said, calculated to "command . . . assent." But only "a people" which already agreed with him could assent to the claims he made in the Declaration. So the assent itself calls into being a people whose "mind" the Declaration was merely expressing, assuming precisely what had yet to be established (and proven).[10] Jefferson's draft of the Declaration – which differed in substantial ways from the one the Continental Congress adopted – should be read in light of his other Revolutionary writing, including, especially, his 1774 paper on the "Rights of British America" – in which he established the contours of what he there called the "American Story" and emphasized the common experience Americans shared of expatriation from the realm. This discussion – originally designed to grant Americans a kind of autonomy within the empire –would later become – through the alchemy of history – a narrative of nationhood legitimizing sovereignty outside the empire. In the new post-Declaration world, the *Summary View*'s mythology was transformed into a history that could legitimize the Declaration's claims that Americans were one people. With the Declaration, Jefferson called the nation into being, but also became its first historian and mythmaker.[11]

We are often so distracted by the truly cosmopolitan nature of Jefferson's discourse – "all men are created equal" – that we overlook the ways in which it affirmed a national identity. The Declaration listed rights as universally applicable, but claimed only that Americans believed them – "*We* hold these truths to be self-evident" – and most Americans, including Jefferson, ultimately lost any clear sense that anyone else would begin to soon. What the Declaration asserts is a cultural claim that Americans embrace certain liberal values and consider these values to be self-evident and universally applicable. What makes these real, then, is not, for the Declaration's purposes, "the nature of the universe or the properties of the human species as such" (though Americans certainly thought that their claims aligned with the natural order), but precisely that Americans believed them. In this sense, the Declaration's assertions are what John Dunn calls the "political history of a culture," a culture whose government would recognize the very rights the British state had failed to uphold.[12] With the

[9] Jefferson to Henry Lee, 8 May 1825, in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, 20 vols. (Washington, DC: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1903–4) (hereafter *L&B*), Volume XVI, 118.

[10] Jacques Derrida, "Declarations of Independence," *New Political Science*, 15 (1986), 7–15. Also see John Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11–15.

[11] Steele, *Thomas Jefferson and American Nationhood*, 11–52.

[12] Quotations from John Dunn, "What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Political Theory of John Locke?", in Dunn, *Interpreting Political Responsibility: Essays, 1981–1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 15–17.

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story of peoplehood, the Declaration moves beyond an anticolonial statement of independence and toward the assertion of a national character and identity oriented around the embrace of natural-rights liberalism. It tells us who this people is – what they are like – and this, in turn, legitimizes the state's claims to sovereignty.

Jefferson was more interested than Congress in making the cultural claims – distinguishing the one people from another, which may explain why Jefferson's draft points its finger more sharply at the "unfeeling brethren" in England who had forced Americans to assume their "equal & independant station … among the powers of the earth."[13] Congress dropped most of Jefferson's lament, masking the anguished features of his draft, which nevertheless offer a suggestion about what was most important to him in this moment. The king may have become "a tyrant … unfit to be the ruler of a people who mean to be free," but it was "our British brethren" who had enabled the king's behavior and that of Parliament. It was they who had been "deaf to the voice of justice & of consanguinity" and who had "by their free election re-established … in power" those "disturbers of our harmony." Worse, perhaps, "they are permitting their chief magistrate to send over not only soldiers of our common blood, but Scotch & foreign mercenaries to invade & deluge us in blood." It was this betrayal of "our common blood" that had "given the last stab to agonizing affection." "We might have been a free & a great people together," but experience had severed the connection and rendered the one people two. Americans would "climb" the "road to glory & happiness" alone.[14]

The Declaration's passage through Congress was delayed, Jefferson remembered, many years later, by "the pusillanimous idea that we had friends in England worth keeping terms with," and it was this very illusion – which "still haunted the minds of many" – which led Congress to strike out "those passages" in the document "which conveyed censure on the people of England."[15] But Jefferson included them precisely because they demonstrated to Americans just how different their own character had become from that of the "unfeeling brethren" they were leaving behind. These passages, then, illuminate or bolster the more positive claims about American character in paragraph 2 and their exclusion from the final

[13] Jefferson's "original Rough draught" of the Declaration, in *PTJ*, Volume I, 423.

[14] Ibid., 426–27. These ties, which rendered their separation "agonizing," remained strong enough even after years of hostility to prompt an 1816 hope for reconciliation in Jefferson to John Adams, 25 Nov. 1816, in *The Adams–Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, ed. Lester J. Cappon, 2nd edn (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) (hereafter *AJL*), 498.

[15] *Autobiography*, in *TJW*, 18.

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draft obscures the crucial place of that paragraph for the meaning of the whole.[16]

For the rest of his life, Jefferson would continue his project of separation, watching – and documenting – the ways in which the English nation, from which the American was separating, would continue on its strikingly different path. Where British conceptions of political obligation had long imagined that subjectship was rooted in the "chance" of birth Jefferson had described in the *Summary View*, Americans would honor "Choice" or volitional allegiance as a natural right.[17] Where Americans understood that right was antecedent to, and transcended, mere power, the English would continue to operate by "the principle that force is right"[18] – that "whatever power can make hers, is hers of right."[19] The British was "a nation of buccaneers,"[20] which "nothing but views of interest can govern."[21] Its "governing principles" were "conquest, colonization, commerce, monopoly," and its government was "the most flagitious which has existed since the days of Philip of Macedon, whom they make their model."[22]

"In war," Americans would treat the English as enemies; "in peace," the English could be America's "friends" if they chose. But in neither case would the English ever again be American "brethren."[23] To be sure, American "laws, language, religion, politics and manners" were "so deeply laid in English foundations, that we shall never cease to consider their history as a part of ours, and to study ours in that as its origin."[24] But Americans should never mistake the one for the other. "Sameness of language, of manners, of appearance" might render "it impossible to distinguish us from her subjects." But "free and

[16] See Garry Wills's discussion of the Declaration as "a sentimental paper," in *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 259–319, esp. 307–19.

[17] The first grievance is in Jefferson's "original Rough draught," in *PTJ*, Volume I, 424; the second is in the text as adopted by the Congress (ibid., 431), as well as in Jefferson's comparative text in his *Autobiography*, in *TJW*, 21.

[18] Jefferson to Caesar Rodney, 10 Feb. 1810, in *TJW*, 1217; TJ to John Adams, Jan. 11, 1816, in *AJL*, 459.

[19] Jefferson to John Langdon, 5 March 1810, in *TJW*, 1220.

[20] Jefferson to Henry Middleton, Jan. 1813, in *L&B*, Volume XIII, 203.

[21] Jefferson to James Madison, 1 Sept. 1785, in James Morton Smith, ed., *The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 1776–1826*, 3 vols. (New York: Norton, 1995) (hereafter *ROL*), Volume I, 381.

[22] Outline of Policy on the Mississippi Question, 2 Aug. 1790, in *PTJ*, Volume XVII, 115; Jefferson to John Adams, 25 Nov. 1816, in *AJL*, 498. Also see Jefferson to John Adams, 28 Sept. 1787, in ibid., 200. Also see Jefferson to David Humphreys, 7 May 1786, in *PTJ*, Volume IX, 469; Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, 13 May 1797, in *TJW*, 1042, and Jefferson to John Langdon, 5 March 1810, in ibid., 1219.

[23] Jefferson's "original Rough draught," in *PTJ*, Volume I, 427.

[24] Jefferson to William Duane, 12 Aug. 1810, in *TJW*, 1228.

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independent men" – the distinguishing features of American character – would never submit "to their bondage" just because "we speak English, and look like them."[25] Americans would recognize each other – not by language and appearance, not by ethnicity or religion – but by their common adherence to what Jefferson later called the "principles of '76."[26] Americans had cast off the "unfeeling brethren" to join in a union of what Jefferson called in his First Inaugural "brethren of the same principle."[27]

If while composing the Declaration he was simply the "passive auditor of the opinions of others," as he told Madison in 1823 – if his "paper of July 4, 1776" was nothing more than "the genuine effusion of the soul of our country at that time" – then Jefferson had produced a story which he assumed would continue to "command" the "assent" of all true Americans. The Declaration would explain their distinctive character and moral commitments – principles that Jefferson assumed Americans would continue to uphold if they were to continue as a people. Little wonder that the central focus of Jefferson's final substantive letter – written as a commemoration of the Declaration of Independence – was his immense satisfaction that the latest generation of "our fellow citizens, after half a century of experience and prosperity, continue to approve the choice we made." The "annual return" of the Fourth of July was an opportunity to "forever refresh our recollections" of the rights proclaimed in the Declaration and "an undiminished devotion to them."[28] It was by their common devotion to these "principles of '76," as Jefferson suggested to his supporters in 1801, that Americans would "learn to rally *& to recognize one another*."[29]

So in the Declaration and in his later elaboration of its centrality to American nationhood, Jefferson merged the civic components of national identity – rational and volitional devotion to law and rights – with the historical and emotionally powerful story of peoplehood that constituted a community of belonging and an inheritance for future generations born (or naturalized) into the community.[30] Future Americans would be most

[25] Jefferson to Madame de Stael, 24 May 1813, in *TJW*, 1275.
[26] Jefferson to Fayetteville Republican Citizens, 17 March 1801, in *PTJ*, Volume XXXIII, 319.
[27] Jefferson, First Inaugural Address, 4 March 1801, in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Federal Edition*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford, 12 vols. (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904–1905) (hereafter *FE*), Volume IX, 195.
[28] Jefferson to Roger C. Weightman, 24 June 1826, in *TJW*, 1517.
[29] Jefferson to Fayetteville Republican Citizens, 17 March 1801, in *PTJ*, Volume XXXIII, 319, emphasis added.
[30] For a brief description of the typical distinction in the literature on nationalism between "civic" and "ethnic" varieties see Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994), 5–9. On the invention of this distinction in the work of Hans Kohn see Craig Calhoun, *Nations Matter: Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 117–46. For a persuasive critique

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themselves when they voluntarily reaffirmed their rootedness in this past. And the historical American identity was precisely an adherence to the future-oriented liberal principles articulated in the Declaration which became not only the American creed but also, in his view, the symbol of American belonging, continual remembrance of which would "nourish our devotion to this holy bond of our Union, and keep it alive and warm in our affections."[31] The point of remembering the Declaration, he told Madison, was "to cherish the principles of the instrument in the bosoms of our own citizens."[32] In other words, true Americans would be distinguished by what they believed, by what drove their heart's pulsations. The nation's "holy purpose" from that first moment of its birth would be "adhesion to" the "principles" of the Declaration and "a sacred determination to maintain and perpetuate them."[33] The elaboration of American nationhood was a lifelong project for Jefferson and his story of American peoplehood had far-reaching implications for American policy. Prior to 1776 American patriots had spent a good deal of time characterizing British policies as counter to the British Constitution and violations of the "rights of Englishmen." After 1776, critiques of this nature ceased and the only way one could challenge policy was to renounce it as un-American.

The un-American has never been a strictly legal category, used to distinguish Americans from non-Americans in a legal sense.[34] Instead, it has largely been

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of the tradition of identifying American nationalism too exclusively with the civic variety see Rogers Smith, "Beyond Toqueville, Mydral, and Hartz," in *American Political Science Review*, 87 (Sept. 1993), 549–66.

[31] Jefferson to Dr. James Mease, 26 Sept. 1825, in *L&B*, Volume XVI, 122–23; Jefferson to Mease, 30 Oct. 1825, in "Notes and Queries," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 41 (1917), 248.

[32] Jefferson to James Madison, 30 Aug. 1823, in *ROL*, Volume III, 1876–77.

[33] Jefferson to John Quincy Adams, 18 July 1826, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress. Also see Robert M. S. McDonald, "Thomas Jefferson's Changing Reputation as Author of the Declaration of Independence: The First Fifty Years," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 19 (Summer 1999), 169–95, 190.

[34] Which is why I largely leave battles over citizenship alone here, except in the sense that struggles over the criteria for naturalization speak to American arguments about what ought to be required of a citizen. A foreigner, after all, can become an American, though the mechanisms by which that will happen have always been in flux. One could even imagine a foreigner considering herself "American" in sentiment without actually going through the process of applying for formal citizenship. But a foreigner can never be an "un-American" precisely because there is no presumption that a foreigner will, of necessity, embrace American values; likewise, because her political obligations lie elsewhere, no foreigner can commit the crime of treason against the United States. See James H. Kettner, *The Development of American Citizenship, 1608–1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); and David James Kiracofe, "Treason and the Development of National Identity in Revolutionary America, 1775–1815," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1995. In

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used to distinguish behavior – or thought – that would seem improper for an American – a kind of internal policing mechanism among citizens (rather than between citizens and aliens). Early on, it was easier for Americans to think in terms of the opposition of *American* and *foreign* values – much as Jefferson had done with the juxtaposition of American with "British" – because of the widespread assumption that Americans were unified and homogeneous. But soon enough, the meaning of the American itself became a contested subject in domestic political and social life as the Revolutionary consensus broke down.[35]

By 1823, when he told Madison that it was "a heavenly comfort to see that these principles are yet so strongly felt," the nation had undergone significant convulsion and the solidification of its meaning had been maintained by political struggle with what Jefferson considered an un-American effort to derail the nation's Revolutionary purpose.[36]

Because Jefferson assumed that real Americans would always imagine "a return under the dominion of Gr. Br." to be "the greatest of all possible miseries,"[37] he found it utterly astonishing to return from Europe to discover what he eventually concluded was a *British* party in America working to "assimilat[e] … us in all things to … the British model," precisely why he could never understand the Federalists as true Americans, but rather as "English in all their relations & Sentiments."[38] The Federalist party was not merely "monarchical and aristocratical"; it was "Anglican" – or un-American – as well.[39] He simply took it for granted that "the toryism with

this context, it seems worth noting Alan McPherson's compelling argument that foreigners have long marshaled the concept "Americanism" to challenge US territorial expansion precisely by holding the United States "to its own [self-proclaimed] standards" of "equality before the law, self-determination, liberal democracy, universal human rights, and free markets." This is a way of calling out American practice as inconsistent with American claims about its values: calling American *practice* un-American, in other words. See McPherson, "Americanism against American Empire," in Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin, eds., *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 169–91, 172.

[35] See Douglas Bradburn, *The Citizenship Revolution: Politics and the Creation of the American Union, 1774–1804* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2009); and Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, & Indian Allies* (New York: Vintage, 2010).

[36] Jefferson to James Madison, 30 Aug. 1823, in *ROL*, Volume III, 1877.

[37] "Reply to the Representations of Affairs in America by British Newspapers," before 20 Nov. 1784, in *TJW*, 573. Also see Jefferson to G. K. van Hogendorp, 13 Oct. 1785, in ibid., 835–36.

[38] Jefferson to Horatio Gates, 30 May 1797, *FE*, Volume VIII, 294. Also see Henry Adams, *The Life of Albert Gallatin* (New York: Peter Smith, 1943), 197–98.

[39] Jefferson to Philip Mazzei, 24 April 1796, in *TJW*, 1036.

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which we struggled in '77 differed but in name from the federalism of '99" as well as "the Anglicism of 1808."[40]

To be sure, Jefferson was hardly alone in turning his political enemies into foreigners, and the Federalists never tired of associating him with Revolutionary France or labeling the Republicans the "democratic frenchified faction in this country."[41] But it was one thing to accuse an opponent of being partial to one foreign power or another, quite another to assert, as Jefferson did, that the Federalists – American citizens who ought to know better – had not made the break that defined Americans in the first place but had retained English "sentiments" and manners. It is easy to smile at what are now understood to be slightly hyperbolic charges of this sort, but the significance of the accusation cannot be overstated. The Federalists, in Jefferson's estimation, were, by their embrace of English mores and governing ideas, threatening everything that was supposed to make America distinctive. Precisely because it was possible for "a country" to be "erased from the map of the world by the dissensions of it's own citizens,"[42] the real threat to liberty in America, he always believed, was no longer the potential "assaults" of British arms, but rather the overweening influence of "English books, English prejudices, English manners, and the apes, the dupes, and designs among our professional crafts."[43] Jefferson even welcomed the War of 1812 as a "second weaning from British principles, British attachments, British manners & manufactures," and later considered the eradication of "English partialities" to be "one of the most consoling expectations from the war." Such purification, he believed, would "form an epoch of a spirit of nationalism and of consequent prosperity," which continued "subordination to the interests & influence of England" would derail.[44]

What dismayed Jefferson about the Federalists was their apparent inability to understand that Americans were not a people who could or should be governed by force or corruption by the "better sort." The Federalists, in other words, were accepting premises which were, by their very nature, inapplicable

[40] Ibid., 1037; Jefferson to John Langdon, 5 March 1810, in ibid., 1218.

[41] *Porcupine's Gazette* quoted in James Morton Smith, *Freedom's Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), 14. Also see Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and the Ordeal of Liberty* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), 367–68, 438.

[42] Jefferson to William Duane, 25 July 1811, in *PTJ, Retirement Series*, Volume IV, 56.

[43] Jefferson to Horatio G. Spafford, 17 March 1814, in *PTJ, Retirement Series*, Volume VII, 249. Jefferson had long worried about the transformation of Americans – through too early contact with European aristocracies and ideas – into "foreigners" with preference for monarchy, hierarchy, and established churches. See Steele, *Thomas Jefferson and American Nationhood*, chapter 2.

[44] Jefferson to William Duane, 20 April 1812, in *PTJ, Retirement Series*, Volume IV, 632–33; Jefferson to Duane, 4 Aug. 1812, in ibid., Volume V, 294.

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in an American context: un-American premises. So his opposition to them was rooted in his sense that they were attempting to apply European ideas of governance to an exceptional people. This is the substance underlying his concern (which might otherwise appear superficial) about their preferences for British manners and style.

III

Jefferson always distinguished the political possibilities in America from those in Europe on the basis of distinctive character traits we might, with certain qualifications, properly label "exceptionalist." "Never was a finer canvas presented to work on than our countrymen," he effused to John Adams in 1796 in a letter in which he spelled out some of the characteristics which rendered Americans uniquely able to govern themselves. "All" Americans, he said, were "engaged in agriculture or the pursuits of honest industry, independent in their circumstances, enlightened as to their rights, and firm in their habits of order and obedience to the laws." The lesson was clear: "If ever the morals of a people could be made the basis of their own government, it is our case."[45] In America, he told Adams years later, "every one may have land to labor for himself if he chuses; or, preferring the exercise of any other industry, may exact for it such compensation as not only to afford a comfortable subsistence, but wherewith to provide for a cessation from labor in old age." It followed, Jefferson noted, that everyone,

> by his property, or by his satisfactory situation, is interested in the support of law and order. And such men may safely and advantageously reserve to themselves a wholesome controul over their public affairs, and a degree of freedom, which in the hands of the Canaille of the cities of Europe, would be instantly perverted to the demolition and destruction of every thing public and private.[46]

Here, and elsewhere, Jefferson made several claims about the United States that will sound trite to practitioners of American studies precisely because they have become such standard themes of American exceptionalism.[47] Because of

[45] Jefferson to John Adams, 28 Feb. 1796, in *AJL*, 260.
[46] Jefferson to John Adams, 28 Oct. 1813, in ibid., 391.
[47] On this point it is worth noting that, unlike later generations who took these characteristics for granted as fixed or rooted in nature, Jefferson always located the peculiarities of American character in history, suggesting that the traits he considered normative for the exercise of democratic republicanism could be lost over time without vigilant attendance to their maintenance. See the important reflections on the nature of this problem in Daniel Rodgers, "Exceptionalism," in Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood, eds., *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 21–40, esp. 22–23; and Eric Foner, "Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?", in *History Workshop Journal*, 17 (1984), 57–80. Also see Carl N. Degler, in "In Pursuit of an American History," in *American Historical Review*, 92 (Feb. 1987), 1–12; and Michael McGerr, "The

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the "immensity of land" in the United States, Americans were "a people at their ease," in possession of a "lovely equality," in which most families, by and large, were not artificially burdened with poverty, where the agricultural labor of men was sustaining and even profitable.[48] America was essentially a classless society, with "no paupers," and very few rich.[49] All Americans were able to maintain a comfortable competence. This generalized prosperity gave Americans a rough equality and freedom from hierarchy, as well as a disposition in favor of law and the constitutional order that seemed to indulge their private pursuits of happiness and – to complete the circle – foster their prosperity. In short, American circumstances had forged a people safe with the franchise and with a degree of liberty unknown in the history of the world: "men susceptible of happiness, educated in the love of order, habituated to self-government, and valuing its blessings above all price."[50]

All of these characteristics were easy to contrast with those of Europe. Since Europeans were "not at their ease," Jefferson argued, they lived degraded lives.[51] Every man in Europe, Jefferson argued, was "either the hammer or the anvil."[52] And European aristocracy created artificial hierarchies that stifled human potential and condemned the mass of society to ignorance and poverty, leaving them without a true stake in the society or any public spirit that might preserve republican government.

And if "the excellence of every government is its adaptation to the state of those to be governed by it," it followed that Americans – "constitutionally & conscientiously Democrats" – could handle liberty without falling into

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Price of the New Transnational History," in *American Historical Review*, 96 (Oct. 1991), 1056–67. On this theme in Jefferson's thought, see Steele, 123–30.

[48] Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 164; Jefferson to Maria Cosway, 12 Oct. 1786, in *PTJ*, Volume X, 448. Like many other observers at the time, Jefferson passed over multiple inequalities in Revolutionary America that would be glaring to later scholars, and Jefferson's confidence about the American common man was predicated, especially in Virginia, to a degree that he was rarely explicit about, upon the enslavement of much of the laboring class. Nevertheless, this theme of unusually widespread prosperity (especially relative to Europe) is as old as the idea of America and remains a prominent component in contemporary American exceptionalism. See Jack P. Greene, *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity from 1492 to 1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); and David M. Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954). For an effort to quantify American prosperity and social mobility in the late eighteenth century see Jackson Turner Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

[49] To Thomas Cooper, 10 Sept. 1814, *L&B*, Volume XIV, 182. Also see *Notes*, 133.

[50] First Annual Message, 8 Dec. 1801, in *TJW*, 503.

[51] "Notes of a Tour through Holland and the Rhine Valley," *PTJ*, Volume XIII, 27–28; 36 n. 29, emphasis added.

[52] Jefferson to Charles Bellini, 30 Sept. 1785, *PTJ*, Volume VIII, 568.

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licentiousness.[53] If, by contrast, "an unprepared people" acquired freedom "by mere force or accident" (instead of through long "habituation" and "growth in the progress of reason"), they would immediately pervert their freedom into "a tyranny still, of the many, the few, or the one." Constitutional monarchy was never "the best possible government," but it just might be "the best" such degraded peoples could "bear."

Because Americans had "sucked in the principles of liberty as it were with their mother's milk," the strength of American republicanism was located "not in our constitution," but "in the spirit of our people."[54] And this American spirit, Jefferson asserted in a remarkable statement, "would oblige even a despot to govern us republicanly."[55] The character of the American people, in other words, would force even tyrants to abide by republican principles if they ever hoped to govern Americans. The American people, Jefferson asserted over and again, would not long suffer a government that did not ascend from their will; nor could they abide a government inconsistent with their republican character, precisely because, as Jefferson put it, "our countrymen" had been "impressed from their cradle" with the "habit of self-government" and the principles of republicanism "so that with them it is *almost innate*."[56]

Accordingly, one of Jefferson's principal critiques of the Federalists in the 1790s was that they were attempting to force upon Americans a style of government ready-made for the European societies he described, but ill-suited to the American people. The Federalists simply did not understand "the difference between the rabble who were used as instruments" for the French revolutionaries, "and the steady & rational character of the American people, in which [they] had not sufficient confidence."[57] The Federalists had to be resisted, Jefferson thought, precisely because they were not sufficiently well attuned to what was special about the American people and destiny.

So the traditional tropes of American exceptionalism vis-à-vis other countries in the international community merged here with – and even necessitated – a description of domestic tensions as a juxtaposition between American and un-American approaches to governance. In this way, Jefferson could characterize his own election to the presidency in 1800 – the defeat of the Federalist agenda – as "the resistance which our republic has opposed to a course of operation *for which it was not destined*."[58] Unlike Republicans, the

[53] Jefferson to Du Pont de Nemours, 24 April 1816, in Dumas Malone, ed., *Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours, 1798–1817* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), 181.
[54] Jefferson to Richard Price, 7 Aug. 1785, in *FE*, Volume IV, 448.
[55] Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, 12 July 1816, *L&B*, Volume XV, 35.
[56] Jefferson to John Breckenridge, 29 Jan. 1800, in *L&B*, Volume X, 149, emphasis added.
[57] Jefferson, Anas, in Ford, ed., *FE*, Volume I, 183.
[58] To James Warren, 21 March 1801, *PTJ*, Volume XXXIII, 398–99, emphasis added.

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Federalists, in their attempt to govern Americans with the tools that had served rulers of the European past – hierarchy, deference, and force – were simply out of touch with American realities. The Federalists, Jefferson later remembered, had worked "to recover . . . in practice the powers which the nation had refused" when it declared itself a separate people in 1776, styling themselves as "authorities independent of [the people's] will" and working to "maintain their privileged orders in splendor and idleness, to fascinate the eyes of the people, and excite in them an humble adoration and submission, as to an order of superior beings." The Federalists attempted to reestablish in America "the doctrines of Europe" precisely because they extrapolated from the universal human experience to that point in history without taking into account the unique experience of the United States.[59] True Americans, Jefferson argued, rejected their politics precisely because that very experience, he believed, had prepared them for new and greater possibilities than political theorists of the past could reasonably expect from other peoples. The election, in this Republican (partisan) narrative, had rendered Federalist ideals un-American. (And, indeed, the Federalists remain the last major party in American history to explicitly deny that Americans were sufficiently different from the rest of the world's peoples that they could practice a uniquely democratic politics.) So Jefferson's evaluation of American "exceptionalism" vis-à-vis other nations quickly turned into a domestic politics of un-Americanism which began the process of marginalizing the Federalists in American collective memory.

IV

Whether Jefferson was right or wrong about the Federalists is not the issue for this essay, though the question is more than germane to the larger theme.[60] What this reading of Jefferson opens up is a path toward exploring all the ways in which political discourse in America has so often asked whether opponents are sufficiently American when they promote policies or endorse social agendas that would, so the claim goes, contribute toward unmaking the uniqueness – the exceptionalism – of America. In other words, we are not particularly concerned here with whether America was in fact exceptional in all the ways Americans have believed or with whether the charge of "un-American" has

[59] Jefferson to Justice William Johnson, 12 June 1823, in *TJW*, 1470. See also Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, 16 Jan. 1811, in *PTJ, Retirement Series*, Volume III, 305: Hamilton believed "in the necessity of either force or corruption to govern men": a deplorable lack of imagination or attention to American realities, in Jefferson's view.

[60] One good place to begin exploring the question is the excellent collection of essays edited by Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, *Federalists Reconsidered* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998).

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corresponded in any meaningful way with a true "American" identity or character.[61] Our suggestion here is merely that these kinds of claims ought to be considered as manifestations of American nationalism – assertions about the nationality – and that the continuity of such discourse throughout American history is a social fact that demands historical analysis.[62]

If various forms of exceptionalism have long been the peculiar expression of American nationalism vis-à-vis other nations, the un-American has long served as a tool of domestic politics. Assertions of exceptionalism, though invested in mythology, can theoretically be evaluated empirically: either the United States is or it is not distinctive against the practices of other nations. But the un-American is an ideal category that can be established or validated only through political struggle. Efforts to evaluate American exceptionalism have generated reams of sociological data that have been used to confirm or deny such claims.[63] But it is much more difficult to say precisely when or why a politician, a party, a religious sect, a law, a practice, a viewpoint, a principle, a food, a sport is "un-American." With a category so subjective, what is its use for scholars? Precisely this: that it gives us a map toward exploring American self-conception and representation – what Americans have thought they were like and were willing to go to the mat to defend or to call out as un-American – through history. And because embedded in any invocation of the "un-American" is certain to be a set of positive assertions about American identity, wherever Americans have called out the "un-American" for exposure becomes a site for the exploration of the discourse of American identity itself.

Because nearly every successful claim about American character runs back through some route to the assertions that Jefferson made in the Declaration, America has at its core a transcendental set of ideals that remain almost unrealizable in practice – in the sense that they are both lofty and always susceptible to divergent interpretations and manipulable by partisans. The un-American, then, is particularly sensitive to the perceived incongruity between the ideal America of the imagination and the reality of current American practice on the ground. This gap has spurred Americans to great achievement in the realm of social justice but it also has frequently generated a politics of nostalgia.

The concept of the un-American is remarkably protean and throughout American history it has been marshaled for projects from left, center, and

[61] A distinction effectively made also in David Brion Davis's introduction to *The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1971), esp. xiii–xiv.

[62] David Hollinger, *In the American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of American Ideas* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985), x.

[63] For example, see the essays in Byron E. Shafer, ed., *Is America Different? A New Look at American Exceptionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

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right; for purposes of progressive social justice, for liberal projects for political equality, and for xenophobic hostility to the very presence of foreigners or to social policies that appear to favor "European" social democracy. The point, in every instance, is to identify political opponents as ignorant of – or hostile to – American realities or ideals.

The Federalists, whose ambivalence about immigration produced a restrictive definition of citizenship that emphasized native birth and natural allegiance, were less comfortable with challenging what they considered to be settled American institutions and practices (and they were also, it must be noted, less enamored of the transcendental authority of the Declaration).[64] They met the threat of a vibrant active public with the argument that the American Revolution had successfully answered most of the major questions so that there was no need for continual engagement or reconceptualization; for them, the obligations of citizenship seemed largely reducible to obedience to established authority.[65] The Federalists practiced their own version of the un-American: in their cosmology, it was the Republicans who wanted to transform the wisdom of the Founders into a radicalism they associated with the French Revolution. The cry of "Un-American!" has often been associated with attempts to foreclose more radical possibilities by associating the "American" exclusively with settled institutions and practices. In this formulation ever since, the "American" becomes a ratification of whatever the United States happens to have done; the "un-American" is anyone who raises questions or seeks to more closely align American practice with a transcendental ideal. It is no accident that Mitt Romney began his campaign for the presidency by castigating President Obama for both "apologiz[ing] for America" and for wanting to "'fundamentally transform' America."[66]

But the un-American has never been the exclusive province of the right – witness E. L. Doctorow's recent essay in the *New York Times* describing the social policies of the current GOP as a recipe for making America "unexceptional" – and others have argued that popular reconceptualization and engagement is the essence of the American Revolutionary tradition itself,

[64] See McDonald, "Thomas Jefferson's Changing Reputation."

[65] On Federalist conceptions of citizenship see Rogers M. Smith, "Constructing American National Identity: Strategies of the Federalists," in Ben-Atar and Oberg, 19–40; Erika Pani, "Saving the Nation through Exclusion: Alien Laws in the Early Republic in the United States and Mexico," *The Americas*, 65 (Oct. 2008), 217–46; and especially Bradburn, *The Citizenship Revolution*, esp. chapters 3–4, 6. On Federalist conceptions of the public see Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 188, 199.

[66] Romney speech at the New Hampshire Primary, *Washington Post*, 10 Jan. 2012. Romney, in contrast, claimed that he would "never apologize for the greatest nation in the history of the earth." Romney's campaign tract was similarly entitled *No Apology: The Case for American Greatness* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010).

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that foreclosing possibilities is the essence of Toryism.[67] And it is certainly possible to imagine a patriotism that refuses a simplistic celebration of whatever America has done or is doing and instead seeks to align the nation with universal values and moral concerns that transcend national boundaries.[68] Frederick Douglass considered "the best friend of a nation" to be the one who "most faithfully rebukes her for her sins" – even if such rebuke exposed the nation's hypocrisies to global critique – rather than the one who "under the specious and popular garb of patriotism, seeks to excuse, palliate, and defend them." But most of the progressive causes in American history – including, eventually, Douglass's – have advanced under the assumption that America was not properly practicing itself: the goal has typically been to wrench American practice into some kind of conformity to American theory precisely so that it could become exceptional again, a nationalist orientation which has long distinguished the American left from many of its European counterparts and which has bewildered and fascinated those concerned with the question "why there is no socialism in the United States."[69]

[67] E. L. Doctorow, "Unexceptionalism: A Primer," *New York Times*, 28 April 2012. On this theme see Peter S. Onuf, "American Exceptionalism and National Identity," *American Political Thought*, 1 (Spring 2012), 77–100. Godfrey Hodgson notes that in the first half of the twentieth century, "anti-Americanism" in Britain was "essentially a distemper of the British Right" which disparaged American "egalitarianism, economic opportunity, and uninhibited fun" and its hostility to aristocracy, monarchy, and colonialism. Now, Hodgson argues, hostility to America is the province of the British left, which associates America with Thatcherism. Once, he says, America "was seen as a great engine for benevolent change; now, justly or unjustly, it is widely seen as a beneficiary of the inequalities and inequities of the status quo." See Godfrey Hodgson, "Anti-Americanism and American Exceptionalism," ITEAS Lecture, University of Dundee, 11 Nov. 2003.

[68] See Martha Nussbaum, "Toward a Globally Sensitive Patriotism," in *Daedalus*, 137 (Summer 2008), 78–93; Cotlar, 52–111; and Nicholas Onuf and Peter S. Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War: Modern History and the American Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 219–46. Also see Jonathan Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890–1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003). For a compelling endorsement of American "covenanted patriotism" see the too-neglected essay by John C. Schaar, "The Case for Patriotism," in *American Review*, 17 (May 1973), 59–99.

[69] Douglass to Horace Greeley, 15 April 1846, in Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass: Early Years, 1817–1849* (New York: International Publishers, 1950), 147. On this strain in Douglass's thought see Eric J. Sundquist, "Introduction," in Sundquist, ed., *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1–22, 14–15. For an overview of the literature on American exceptionalism see Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: Norton, 2000), 15–41. For a critique of the practice described here see Amy Kaplan, "A Call for a Truce," *American Literary History*, 17 (2005), 141–47, esp. 146. For an affirmation of it see Leo Marx, "On Recovering the 'Ur' Theory of American Studies," ibid., 118–34, esp. 131–32.

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So the concept of the "un-American" – though it has long been used to identify domestic enemies – also has, in certain formulations, a kind of redemptive power to demand self-evaluation and call Americans back to first principles. And yet, if David Hollinger is right to emphasize capacious democratic aspirations as a prime signifier of American identity, Dorothy Ross properly reminds us of the ways in which "nationalist ideology" has just as often stifled reform, rendering invisible "the contradictions between ideals and practice" and "bath[ing] the darker shades of national reality in the glow of the ideal."[70] Historians, then, must both remember what the national narratives forget and, at the same time, evaluate those narratives of continuity and seamlessness, too, as social action worthy of analysis.

If the "un-American" as a theoretical concept is to become more than a mere recapitulation of the "paranoid style," its protean nature should not be ignored. The paranoid style, as Hofstadter originally formulated it, is not anchored in a compelling appraisal of political reality; the un-American, by contrast, can be a device for creating political reality. When assertions of un-Americanism fail to capture the public assent – Robert Welch's insistence that Dwight Eisenhower was a conscious communist agent, for example – they are confirmed as "paranoid." Countless such movements claiming exclusive possession of Americanism have themselves been progressively rendered "un-American" by later reconceptualizations of the American. One way to read the McCarthy era, in retrospect, is as a liberal triumph that rendered the conservative witch hunt itself un-American (though perhaps only temporarily). Certainly our dominant historical narratives turn the tables on the principals in this story: the House Un-American Activities Committee typically plays the role of the most un-American thing in the room. And, yet, at the time, the committee was engaged – to at least some degree – in the process of defining what it might mean to practice Americanism in a dangerous postwar world. Whether that would mean (among other things) censoring the contents in the libraries of US embassies, weeding out material written by "controversial persons, Communists, fellow travelers" (including Mark Twain and Theodore Dreiser, apparently), or celebrating abstract expressionism and a dissenting literary tradition as indicative of the democratic freedoms enjoyed in the West, was very much an open question at the time.[71] To take another example, if today we agree with many antebellum activists

[70] David Hollinger, "The Historian's Use of the United States and Vice Versa," in Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 381–95, 392; Ross, "Lincoln, and the Ethics of Emancipation: Universalism, Nationalism, Exceptionalism," *Journal of American History* (Sept. 2009), 386.

[71] See Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 76–82. Also see Aaron Copland's brief and suggestive description of the banning of his *Lincoln Portrait* from the

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that slavery is "un-American," we must do so in spite of the fact that Americans practiced it for well over two hundred years. Slavery, in other words, *became* un-American – but only after political struggle and much bloodshed. Prior to that, it is difficult to deny that slavery was, in fact, as American as apple pie.[72]

When a movement oriented around the goal of rendering a particular practice un-American prevails, it becomes – retroactively – the only way to read the national creed. The concept of the un-American actually serves – or has served in the past – to, paradoxically, give Americans a sense that only a minority of outliers could hold views so at odds with the American creed embraced by the overwhelming majority of the American people: precisely the way Jefferson described his political enemies.[73] Thus endemic threats are retroactively externalized: Slavery wasn't *American*, we think, after all; now we very often remember it – rightfully or not – as a peculiarly southern aberration. To take another example, the only way we can identify the emphasis on language and biological descent in Woodrow Wilson's nationalism as "deeply 'unamerican'" is if we emphasize the civic components of American ideology over its history of excluding people on the basis of descent, a battle not quite over, to understate things in 2013.[74]

Maybe this is what Perry Miller meant when he said that the American was "not something inherited but something to be achieved" and that "generalizations about the American character can amount to no more than a statistical survey of the decisions so far made." And, interestingly enough, Miller argued in a backdoor endorsement of our concept: "he who would fix the pattern of decision by confining the American choice to one and only one mode of response . . . is the truly 'Un-American.'"[75]

So the "un-American" can revitalize our study of American identity, not by leading us to worry over whether American practices are normative and exceptionalist, but by forcing us to think through the ways the various

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Eisenhower inauguration concert at Constitution Hall, in Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (New York: St. Martin's, 1984), 346–47.

[72] See also Edmund S. Morgan's classic argument that the flourishing of democratic republican institutions and individual freedom for whites was inseparable from the institution of black slavery in the early republic: *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975).

[73] Jefferson to Thomas Law, 15 Jan. 1811, in *PTJ, Retirement Series*, Volume III, 298–99. Also see Davis, *Fear of Conspiracy*, xvi.

[74] David Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 134–35; Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U. S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

[75] Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 13. Also see Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

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manifestations of this concept throughout American history demonstrate precisely what is at stake in such debates: on what terms have Americans claimed to represent Americanness? What in American practice has been rendered "un-American" through political struggle and social movements?

All national mythologies emphasize some events in the past and deemphasize (or forget) others.[76] The American memory tends to forget its sins in a progressive tale of ever-greater openness and inclusion. Because historians must remember what the collective memory must minimize, their tales are messier – more complex – than those of the collective consciousness. When the forgetting is a by-product of repentance, this act of collective memory (or forgetting) can be redemptive. But that which has been rendered un-American by the national *narrative* ought not to be ignored either by the historian – whose story must admit that, yes, those things really were "American" at one point until they fell out of favor with the national reconceptualization of its creed – or by the citizen who can see that the American is in the process of continual definition. Present practices become "un-American" only retroactively and the national past is progressively redeemed by the future, but only in terms established by the past, the American tradition, the tradition which invented the un-American. So we can analyze the "un-American" as a concept in American history without ignoring the history that it has rendered invisible in our collective narratives.

In this admittedly conjectural reading, then, the greatest exponent of the redemptive face of the "un-American" turns out to be Lincoln, who took Jefferson as axiomatic (literally: "The principles of Jefferson," he said in 1859, "are the definitions and axioms of a free society") but made Jefferson mean something specific to Lincoln's own time and place. What distinguishes Lincoln is his unwillingness to jettison the tradition – in contrast to both abolitionists like Garrison and pro-slavery theorists like Fitzhugh – he was nevertheless willing to remake. Garrison, for example, never imagined that the practice of slavery was un-American. Instead, he argued that what had, regrettably, become American was no longer compatible with justice, Christian morality, and natural rights. His solution was to burn the Constitution in favor of a higher law.[77] What Lincoln did was very different: he argued that slavery was by definition – precisely because of its incompatibility with

[76] See Sheldon Wolin, "Injustice and Collective Memory," in Wolin, *The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 32–46. Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607–1876* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. 256–61, 282–98, offers a substantive critique of this tendency. Also see John Bodnar, *The "Good War" in American Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 199, 236.

[77] Todd Gitlin has suggested that the American left followed the same path in the 1960s: disgusted by the nation's complicity with injustice, many critics denied "its very right to exist,"

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Christian morality, justice, and natural rights, *but also because of its violation of Jefferson's Declaration* – un-American. For Lincoln, Jefferson's Declaration was "a rebuke and a stumbling-block to the very harbingers of re-appearing tyranny and oppression."[78] The only solution, he argued consistently before the war, was to wash our "soiled" Republican Robes "in the spirit, if not the blood, of the Revolution" – to "re-adopt" the Declaration and make American practice compatible with its highest ideals, the "better angels of our nature."[79]

Of course, the trouble with such a narrative is that it leaves open the question whether America is more apostate or impostor, to take David Hendrickson's useful juxtaposition. For if the concept of the "un-American" can be redemptive, it also has the potential to sanctify "unholy propensities" and revitalize – rather than temper – America's reflexive sense of its exceptionalism. In light of this conundrum, Philip Roth's recent novel *The Plot Against America*, in addition to being a profound meditation on history, offers a model approach to the theme of the "un-American."[80] The story – which is, as Roth is quick to note, entirely fictional (365) – follows the fortunes of the Newark, New Jersey Roth family after Charles Lindbergh wins the presidential election of 1940 on a platform expressing his intention to "preserve American democracy" by keeping the United States out of the European War (30). Over time, the Lindbergh administration reaches an understanding with both Germany and Japan, pledging neutrality in what had already become World War II, and creates a series of programs ostensibly designed to "Americanize" purportedly ethnocentric American Jews which become, however, increasingly sinister as the plot develops, ending in a series of pogroms perpetrated by mobs of "upright American Christians unleashed by the acting president of the United States" (357).

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and thus, to an extent, embraced the right's definition of them as un-American. See Todd Gitlin, *The Intellectuals and the Flag* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 131–36.

[78] Lincoln to Henry L. Pierce and Others, 6 April 1859, in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings, 1858–1865*, ed. Don E. Feherenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 19.

[79] Speech on Kansas–Nebraska, Peoria, Illinois, 16 Oct. 1854, in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings, 1832–1858*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989) 339–40, 340–41; First Inaugural Address, 4 March 1861, in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings, 1858–1865*, 224. To be clear, Lincoln admitted – most eloquently in the Second Inaugural – that slavery was, in fact, American, after all. His point, though, was that what had become American practice was a violation of American ideology and that the sin demanded repentance and redemption. It seems worth noting, though, by way of clarification, that Lincoln spent his entire political career arguing that slavery was in fact un-American. This is what makes his later admission striking. The point is that he was in a struggle over whether what he considered un-American would remain so.

[80] David C. Hendrickson, "A Dissenter's Guide to Foreign Policy," *World Policy Journal* (Spring 2004), 102–13, 110 and 112. Also see Kaplan, "A Call for a Truce," 146. Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004).

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What pushes Roth's book beyond an interesting counterfactual exercise is precisely the way he wrestles with American identity and with the concept of the un-American. From the title on, especially through the character of Mr. Roth, the book calls out Lindbergh's program as "un-American," but at the same time recognizes that Lindbergh's program nevertheless appeals to something latent within American culture – an identification of American character exclusively with ascriptive and thus immutable attributes not shared by Jews or other "ethnics" – that is in fact being exalted and practiced (in the story) as the essence of Americanism.[81] So Lindbergh's program, it progressively dawns on the reader, is "un-American" only insofar as it clashes with the transcendental ideal articulated in the Lincolnian reading of the Declaration of Independence that Mr. Roth embraces. On a visit to Washington, DC, young Philip realizes that his family was "counting on . . . American history . . . to protect us against Lindbergh" (58).

As the story unfolds, Mr. Roth (the character) continually refuses to flee to Canada with others in his neighborhood who have given up on America – conceded it to Lindbergh – precisely because he remains convinced that the America he believes in simply cannot abide such a series of events and will, in fact, surely come to reject Lindbergh's program as un-American. But what Roth (the author) seems to want readers to understand is that such a program is "un-American" only as long as Americans reject it as incompatible with their deepest values. Roth never pretends that any of the least-attractive aspects of American identity – the stuff typically denied by American exceptionalism – are not really there. The story continually reminds us of their presence. But Roth knows that the story he tells did not really happen.[82] He knows that the US fought the "good war" against fascism, and reaffirmed its commitment to the most capacious kind of reading of the Declaration of Independence articulated in Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms." What is compelling about the book, and what keeps it from descending into just another interesting counterfactual exercise, is the way Roth forces us to rethink the inevitability of the "good war" narrative we tell about the era.[83] So in the end we remember that America fought the "good war," yes, but only because

[81] See Rogers Smith, "Beyond Toqueville, Mydral, and Hartz," *American Political Science Review*, 87 (Sept. 1993), 549–66; and Smith, *Civic Ideals*, for extensive discussion and commentary on the ebb and flow of what Smith calls this ascriptive "ideology" and practice in American history.

[82] Note, apropos of the critiques of Wolin and Guyatt (see note 76 above), that Jim Crow segregation and the internment of Japanese Americans is (conspicuously?) ignored in Roth's story.

[83] See Michael C. C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); and especially Bodnar, *The "Good War in American Memory*."

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certain values and ideals that were reaffirmed as "American" triumphed over others that very likely would have been spun – as Roth's (fictional) Lindbergh did spin them – in the same way: as American ideals.

The point here is that a contest over the content of American character is embedded in all claims about Americanism and in all accusations of the "un-American." This is its analytical value to historians and scholars of American studies. But all *uses* of the un-American are nationalist almost by definition, and American struggles over the concept in civic life will continue to revolve around the story of their peoplehood and the claims about their character embedded in the Declaration of Independence which first articulated the un-American and which continually pushes them to read their practice against its claims.

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