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Modern Intellectual History, 14, 2 (2017), pp. 619–629 © Cambridge University Press 2016
doi:10.1017/S1479244316000354

ACHIEVING THE AMERICAN SOUL

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Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015)

Kevin M. Schultz, *Buckley and Mailer: The Difficult Friendship That Shaped the Sixties* (New York: Norton, 2015)

In 1963—as good a date as any to serve as a pivot between "fifties" and "sixties" America—James Baldwin remarked, "The American Negro has the great advantage of having never believed the collection of myths to which white Americans cling: that their ancestors were all freedom-loving heroes, that they were born in the greatest country the world has ever seen, or that Americans are invincible in battle and wise in peace."[1] It was a bracing declaration, a bit gentler than Malcolm X's designation of Negroes as "victims of Americanism" and perhaps by now, as historians focus ever greater attention on the nationally constitutive role of slavery and white supremacy, almost a commonplace. Yet Baldwin's idea remains challenging to plumb and to fully inhabit. For at that moment, which both Kevin Schultz and Andrew Hartman suggest was preoccupied with "the very question of America and its meaning,"[2] Baldwin's little book, *The Fire Next Time*, upended the whole debate. He was no black nationalist and, notwithstanding his expatriate life in France, no "emigrationist," for he believed that blacks in the United States were, socially and culturally, wholly of, if not in, this country; and yet, given the deep corruption in the national past, there was no "meaning" to return to, reclaim, realize, or vindicate as a promise of black freedom. The verb Baldwin chose, in a determinedly existentialist vein, was to "*achieve* our country"—to create a viable moral meaning for national identity where none as yet existed.[3] If Schultz's subjects, William F. Buckley Jr, and Norman Mailer, were "vying for the soul of the nation" and Hartman's warriors

1 James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York, 1963), 36.
2 Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago, 2015), 10.
3 Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 141, emphasis added.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244316000354 Published online by Cambridge University Press

fighting "for the soul of America," they were—in Baldwin's perspective—chasing a chimera. Such a thing wasn't there; it was yet to come, if at all.[4]

Both these books are about the 1960s and their aftermath—and thus too about the preceding years, the 1950s. Try as we might, historians seemingly cannot escape treating these decadal periods as benchmarks—even if naming their significance always varies. For Schultz, the "fifties" was a time dominated by the "*Liberal* Establishment," against which, he argues, Buckley and Mailer both rebelled, from the right and the left respectively, and in so doing "shaped the Sixties."[5] For Hartman, on the other hand, "a cluster of powerful *conservative* norms set the parameters of American culture" in the 1950s, securing a "normative America" of Cold War mobilization combined with orthodoxies of work, self-reliance, sexual containment, and faith that was "more omnipresent, and more coercive, than it had been before or has been since."[6] These two characterizations, however different, both ascribe to the 1950s (with a few caveats each writer offers) reigning principles of conformity and stability. For Buckley and Mailer in Schultz's account, that order rested on a barely questioned modernist standard of rationality, technology, and progress antipathetic to religious faith as well as to human passion; for Hartman's conservative culture warriors, the 1950s backdrop appeared as a preserved Christian definition of Americanism. All these attributes, and more, are apt in various ways, thereby reinforcing how difficult it is to define the "meaning" of a decade, let alone a nation.

If the 1950s assumes a singular cast in these accounts, the tonality of 1960s (at least for Schultz, whose book focuses for the most part on this decade alone) appears more modulated, shifting a few times over the course of the narrative. Buckley and Mailer, personifications of deep-dyed conservatism and transgressive rebel respectively, first met at a 1962 public debate in Chicago witnessed by three thousand paying ticket-holders—a moment "right in the sweet spot of America's last great age of public intellectuals," after which the two discovered in each other a common disposition to buck mainstream convention and to take seriously a crisis in "the nature of man."[7] Schultz depicts at least the second quarter of the decade as a time of heady excitement when critiques from both right and left seemed to dispel the miasma of the 1950s, a phase

4 Kevin M. Schultz, *Buckley and Mailer: The Difficult Friendship That Shaped the Sixties* (New York, 2015), 4.

5 Ibid., 22, 48–53, emphasis added.

6 Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 5, emphasis added.

7 Schultz, *Buckley and Mailer*, 11. Schultz's first chapter, "The Nature of Man," suggests a common preoccupation of the magazine editor and the novelist that fits well with the thesis of Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (Princeton, 2015).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244316000354 Published online by Cambridge University Press

succeeded by more astringent arguments between the two protagonists following escalation in Vietnam. Finally, the decade's end yielded a common sense that disorder had taken a course displeasing to both erstwhile rebels. The 1960s appear otherwise in Hartman's account, as his view stretches forward at least three more decades. He sums up the 1960s more unambiguously as "liberation" (for oppressed minorities, women, gays, youth). Of course, as those changes unhinged the apparent national cohesion of the prior decade and, in Hartman's words, "*universalized* fracture" beyond a point ever before recognized even by those conscious of American culture's fault lines, "liberation" spelled "national decline" for a cultural right devoted from the 1970s onward to bringing about a restoration.[8]

Both books are exceptionally lively intellectual histories of what is more or less the public culture (rather than narrower currents of specialized thought) of the twentieth century's second half. We might imagine William Buckley and Norman Mailer as figures present at the creation of the modern American culture wars, one a traditionalist and the other a self-declared liberator, but that is not Schultz's point. Despite having labeled Mailer a "pervert" in the magazine *National Review* that he had founded in 1955, Buckley took a liking to him immediately upon their 1962 debate, and a friendship constructed of a rich and affectionate correspondence (as well as occasional sails together on Buckley's schooner) grew over the mid-1960s. Although born to wealth—as well as certainty in conservative belief—and practiced in styles of refinement, Schultz's Buckley liked to think of himself as a bit of a bad boy too (a motorcyclist in Manhattan like Mailer, when he wasn't riding in his chauffeured limousine, pissing out the door on the street when stopped at a light). Schultz tries too hard, I think, to portray both as "revolutionaries" viewed by themselves and others as leaders of movements: Buckley may have been a movement leader but his law-and-order principles could in no way be considered revolutionary; Mailer despite his published fantasies of himself as co-conspirator of John Kennedy's was never considered a political leader—certainly not by the New Left, however many young radicals might have viewed him as an ally. Nonetheless, Schultz plausibly suggests that each saw in the other a shared "searing love of country" as well as some kind of sincere search for meaning in the relation of "God and man," however divergent their paths.[9] Beyond that, they were, obviously, both intellectual celebrities with large ambitions; each waged a quixotic campaign to be mayor of New York City, four years apart (1965 and 1969), both challenging a characteristic 1960s

8 Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 4, emphasis added, 9–38.

9 Schultz, *Buckley and Mailer*, 207. On Mailer's imagined bond with Kennedy see Mailer's November 1960 *Esquire* essay "Superman Comes to the Supermarket," treated in ibid., 90–92.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244316000354 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"liberal," John Lindsay. They each admired the literary abilities of the other, though Buckley (to his credit) clearly recognized this difference: "he's a genius and I'm not."[10]

To my mind, the governing conceit of the book—that the odd couple of Buckley and Mailer constituted "the difficult friendship that shaped the Sixties"—simply does not work, but there's much more to the book than that. There are beautifully rendered set pieces describing intellectual encounters through the 1960s: James Baldwin's skewering of Buckley at a Cambridge, England, debate; Buckley and Mailer discussing Vietnam on *Firing Line*; the lunacy of Truman Capote's notorious "Black and White Ball," thrown with his earnings from *In Cold Blood*, when a drunken Mailer failed at enticing McGeorge Bundy into a fistfight. Indeed, Mailer wasn't Buckley's only left-leaning friend: Murray Kempton and John Kenneth Galbraith also fit the mold (and in fact, the solicitude of such liberals and radicals for Buckley may have helped to make him respectable at the time). We might wonder how anyone tending leftward could countenance Buckley in light of his retrograde, blatantly racist hostility to the civil rights movement (though Mailer saw and denounced it, and Schultz provides an unblinking description of it). Then again, Mailer too wrote some shockingly racist things even if (in his mind) he stood in solidarity with "the blacks." Then, too, just as surprising as Mailer's link to Buckley may be his ongoing friendship with sober-minded Diana and Lionel Trilling.

Although debates on the status of intellectuals in American life—and laments on the disappearance of "public intellectuals"—have been overdone, there is something to Schultz's claim to represent, vividly, a bygone age when three thousand spectators would pay to see two writers debate, and a quasi-institution of New York City in the 1960s, known as the "Theater of Ideas," could host a newsworthy confrontation between Norman Mailer and his feminist critics at the dawn of women's liberation. What, however, was the outcome of the narrative offered in *Buckley and Mailer*? The book's brief aftermath following Mailer's battle with the feminists suggests that "the Sixties" ended there (so Diana Trilling said). It seems as if the demolition of the "Liberal Establishment" that Bill Buckley and Norman Mailer abhorred was completed, though not exactly in the way either of the two protagonists would have chosen. As the productivity and stability of postwar corporate capitalism gave way, over time, to a renewed competitive capitalism eager to satisfy any desire, the rigor of the Establishment's behavioral "Rules" lay in shambles. It is here that Schultz and Hartman, whatever labels they apply to the 1950s, agree, though the end of Schultz's 1960s is but the starting line for Hartman's expert dissection of the culture wars that followed.

[10] Quoted in ibid., 331.

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It was another friend of Bill's—Daniel Patrick Moynihan—who was one of the first, in 1970, to suggest the validity of the term "culture war" for intellectual debate in the United States since that time. He actually referred directly to the German *Kulturkampf* of the late nineteenth century in a memo to Richard Nixon depicting a confrontation between an "adversary culture" and "traditional America."[11] Hartman ably reconstructs the evolution of these ideas: "adversary culture" was Lionel Trilling's phrasing of a key streak in the sensibility of modernist arts—the tropism toward critique, the disposition to challenge settled norms of the surrounding society. Initially advanced by Trilling in something less than an alarmist mood, the phrase caught fire when a number of writers—most notably Norman Podhoretz at *Commentary* magazine and others writing for it—recoiled from the high pitch of protest in the late 1960s and saw the adversarial disposition made flesh in a disloyal opposition burgeoning within American society. Podhoretz devoted his magazine from 1970 on to attacking the "new sensibility" that derided conventional moral strictures regarding restraint of sexuality, sustenance of the conjugal family, respect for authority, and standards of civility. To be sure, there existed those figures in the arts and in youth politics who insisted on unbounded self-expression, no holds barred. Still, Podhoretz's definition of the "new sensibility" and its penchant for rebellion was always somewhat a caricature, suggesting that new currents of thought seeking the release of psychosocial repressions were simply amoral or immoral; no recognition is granted to genuine moral tenets held by those who imagined freedom from mortifying conventions as a path to a better life (seriously) of peace, love, and understanding. Indeed, this book does not adequately challenge the deep assumption, so often repeated by cultural conservatives, that the countercultural ethos of "doing your own thing" literally meant "anything goes."[12]

Nonetheless, Hartman superbly narrates the emergence of "neoconservatives" like Podhoretz and other pathfinders such as Irving Kristol and Gertrude Himmelfarb, whose solicitude for bygone "Victorian values" was matched by virulent anticommunism and a current of social science insistent on the "unanticipated consequences" of welfare-state reform. The neoconservatives also fashioned the idea of a "new class" of upper middle-class professionals and inhabitants of the culture industries who served as the organized agents of adversary culture. Not all cultural conservatives took the *class* character of this milieu very seriously, but what counted for the neocons was the notion—melding with Kevin Phillips's Nixonite strategy for a new Republican majority—that a new, burgeoning, university-educated upper middle class now derided, and set its

[11] Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 51.

[12] See Robert Bork, quoted in Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 155.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244316000354 Published online by Cambridge University Press

head against, the homely interests of "white ethnics" of working- or lower-middle-class neighborhoods.[13] In Hartman's compelling analysis, these neoconservative intellectuals had "innovated much of the logic that informed the conservative side of the culture wars ... but the Christian Right formed [its] demographic bedrock."[14]

Hartman notes "the paradox of American secularization," which saw a "waning in the *scope* of religious authority" (evident in the secular principle that characterized, more and more openly, the realms of government, law, and education) while church membership and professed belief remained, compared to other highly industrialized societies, exceptionally high.[15] That said, it appears here as if devout Christians awoke with a shock in the late 1960s to find their bedrock assumptions of the norms governing a Godly nation suddenly under attack. As they aligned with the neoconservatives, now two constituencies agreed "that American culture was in decline," thus establishing the premise that has rested at the very heart of the conservative side of the culture wars thereafter. Hartman does not explore thoroughly the decline of "mainline" Protestant churches and the compensating growth of "evangelical" or "fundamentalist" churches, though his account is well-informed by recent writing in American religious history.[16] He does point out that the organization of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority was spurred both by fear of Justice Department intentions to deny tax-exempt status to private (Christian) schools discriminating by race ("disentangling the Christian Right's moral panic from white racial panic is no easy task," he aptly notes) and by a new idea of rallying the "orthodox" currents across Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish lines.[17]

Following his analysis of the formation of the culture war's right wing (neoconservative logic appended to a Christian right base), Hartman offers a sequence of six more chapters each devoted to one of the topical arenas that witnessed the most brutal sparring—over race, feminism, the popular and high arts, schooling, university scholarship, and the "history wars" fought over such matters as the Smithsonian *Enola Gay* exhibit. Rightly beginning his tour with race—the real "bedrock" of American life disturbed by the seismic

13 For a critique see Daniel Bell, "The New Class: A Muddled Concept," in B. Bruce-Briggs, ed. *The New Class?* (New Brunswick, Transaction, 1979), 169–90.

14 Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 101.

15 Ibid., 79, emphasis added.

16 For telling interpretations of that trend see David Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, 2013); Axel R. Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives: American Evangelicalism from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right* (Madison, 2011); Axel R. Schäfer, *Piety and Public Funding: Evangelicals and the State in Modern America* (Philadelphia, 2012).

17 Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 85.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244316000354 Published online by Cambridge University Press

jolts of the black freedom struggle—Hartman seamlessly surveys a range of intellectual and political developments from attacks on affirmative action to Bill Clinton's campaign tactic of denouncing rapper Sister Souljah, from critical race theory to debates over Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis, as well as James Q. Wilson's "broken-windows" program for policing urban crime. The method works remarkably well, layering a host of related disputes in many registers and aptly catching the tone and pitch of a contentious intellectual era. As Hartman's tour proceeds through feminism and "gender troubles" and on to the hot buttons of Andres Serrano, Robert Mapplethorpe and the National Endowment for the Arts, he not only describes notable skirmishes over censorship and free expression but also elucidates arguments that pitted Nancy Chodorow's and Carol Gilligan's "difference" feminism against Judith Butler's deconstruction of the female subject and the McKinnon–Dworkin thesis on pornography set against "sex-positive" feminism. As in the dispute sparked by scientist Alan Sokal's spoof of postmodern critical theory (showing, Hartman explains, that "tight linkages between epistemology and political ideology ... make no sense"), the culture wars flared not only between "right" and "left" but also within each camp and in a few cases "scrambled" the lines altogether.[18] By the time we reach the public schools and Hartman's lens pans from school prayer to anti-Darwinism, from the resumption of an old argument against Deweyan "progressive education" to William Bennett's campaign to restore "basic education," we see one of the key splits on the culture war's right between Christian homeschoolers and neoconservatives like Bennett who sought to nationalize testing in basic skills.

Certain themes recur throughout, such as a contest between Christian morality and "secular humanism," between "relativism" on the one hand and either "traditional" faiths or Allan Bloom's "permanent concerns of mankind" on the other. For the most part, however, Hartman avoids unduly repetitive stories. At key points, he neatly punctures false appearances, demonstrating, for instance, that the Stanford students chanting "Hey hey, ho ho, Western culture's got to go" in the late 1980s were not threatening to overthrow deeply held traditions but protesting instead the recent restoration of a core curriculum that had been considered obsolete already in the 1950s and 1960s. Likewise, the conservative (and liberal, as in Arthur Schlesinger Jr's broadside *The Disuniting of America*) assault on "multiculturalism" failed to recognize that notion as already a defanged legacy of antiracist campaigns, now "more about representing diversity than about challenging institutional hierarchy."[19]

While thus debunking some tropes of the cultural right, Hartman at other moments runs the risk of taking the right's depiction of affairs as fact. By pinning

[18] Ibid., 146, 237.

[19] Ibid., 231–2, 203.

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his analysis on the supposition that "liberation" in the 1960s "universalized fracture" and brought the "acids of modernity" suddenly to full strength, Hartman effectively identifies the *idea* of "America" coming apart with *reality*, an instance of the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness," as Alfred North Whitehead put it. It is much the same with left–liberal critics of "neoliberalism," who sometimes imagine that the theory reflects actual social relations now utterly atomized in an unbound, corrosive individualism.[20] The book is peppered with other remarks that mistake the word for the thing: on the question of the "meaning" of America, "there seemed to be no middle ground"; while George H. W. Bush sought to "straddle the center" in appointing John Frohnmeyer to head the NEA, "this was a center that would not hold." If things fell apart, really, in this manner, social disorder would be dire indeed. And occasionally, in *A War for the Soul of America*, we do see—in the proliferation of violent attacks on abortion clinics and providers, for instance—that culture wars were not only cultural.[21] Still, it is advisable to treat claims of deep cultural fracture with caution and inquire instead into the forces that raise such claims to prominence at certain times and subdue them at others.

Hartman's judgments on that score are not utterly clear. On the one hand, he writes, "There was no going back. The culture wars were the new American norm. The culture wars were the defining narrative of postmodern America."[22] Such a judgment appears to resemble the well-known argument of James Davison Hunter's 1991 book *Culture Wars*, that the harsh debates of the time, as real manifestations of incommensurable moral dispositions ("orthodox" versus "progressive") were "interminable."[23] Yet Hartman benefits from greater distance and historical perspective to judge (perceptively, I think) that Patrick Buchanan's famous declaration of cultural war at the 1992 Republican convention came at a time when the war was essentially lost, for "the America of the conservative imagination was dead or dying." And so, in the book's conclusion, and contrary to Hunter's older diagnosis, Hartman writes (perhaps with the victory of marriage equality in mind), "the logic of the culture wars has been exhausted." In the end, he argues, the "culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s" amounted to "an adjustment period." Having "adjusted" to "cultural change" initiated by the 1960s, "a growing

[20] On the "acids of modernity" see ibid., 4, 71. For Talcott Parsons's use of Whitehead's fallacy to challenge a common moralistic critique of capitalism see Howard Brick *Transcending Capitalism: Visions of a New Society in Modern American Thought* (Ithaca, 2006), 131.

[21] Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 10, 197, 151.

[22] Ibid., 252.

[23] James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York, 1991), 220.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244316000354 Published online by Cambridge University Press

majority of Americans now accept and even embrace what at the time [in the 1980s and 1990s] seemed like a new nation."[24]

In determining what defines this "new nation," however, equivocation remains. Given his notion that the "acids of modernity" burned through the foundations of national culture, Hartman suggests—seemingly at odds with his earlier judgment that the logic of the wars was exhausted—that we are now left with "permanent cultural revolution," making any kind of solidarity around a "common culture" impossible. But then, wouldn't the anxiety over the loss of a moral "center" only persist, "interminably"? The book's conclusion tries to square the circle this way: if the logic of the culture wars in fact no longer works, it is because a rough settlement imposed by "the reigning American economic ideology—the belief in the goodness of capitalism" and the business interests behind it prescribe the acceptance of gay identities (as a body of consumers) and mold feminist ideals of equality into a refurbished bourgeois work ethic (viz. Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In*).[25] In that case, however, it's not so that "the sixties gave birth to a new America." Rather, we might conclude, as Jefferson Cowie argues in *The Great Exception*, that we're stuck with the old, familiar America, as the unusual terms of social solidarity in the Depression era (and lodged in the "New Deal order") are unlikely to recur.[26]

The conundrum remains: what changed and what stayed the same? If Hartman notes that some things old are actually new (like Stanford's restored Western Civilization common core in the 1980s), then some things new are likewise old. *A War for the Soul of America* devotes less attention than it might to prior "culture wars" in American history from antebellum reform movements and nativism to fundamentalism in the 1920s and onward to the whole raft of evangelical anticommunists like Carl McIntire in the 1950s and the furor (stirred by a kind of educational fundamentalism) over "Why Johnnie Can't Read."[27] If culture wars are perennial in American life, the meaningful question is what makes them more salient at some times than at others, and how one periodic manifestation resembles or differs from others. That would call for a more focused explanation of what was at stake in the cultural politics of the 1980s and 1990s, what forces motivated the resurgence of this type of debate, which flourished in various ways also in the 1840s, 1890s, 1920s, and 1950s. If the "acids of modernity" account

[24] Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 199, 285.

[25] Ibid., 285–90.

[26] Jefferson Cowie, *The Great Exception: The New Deal and the Limits of American Politics* (Princeton, 2016).

[27] On Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read* see Jamie Cohen-Cole, "Psychology, Phonics, and Politics," paper delivered at Social Science, Ideology, and Public Policy in the United States, 1960s to the Present conference, University of Toronto, 17–19 Oct. 2014.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244316000354 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for spurring the "fundamentalist reaction" witnessed after the 1970s, we have a story of modernization that we have seen many times before, and, in each case, observers in its wake have cheered a successful "adjustment," as liberals of the 1950s did in ascribing all the nasty features of the 1920s to a backward rural culture that was withering away—though such explanations become less satisfying as they are repeated.[28]

To be sure, works of intellectual history often (and rightly) choose not to seek explanations but to offer instead penetrating description and interpretation. Both these books illuminate the intellectual scene of past moments in the recent past with striking clarity and verve. They also share an interpretation: that the principal historical actors they portray were "vying for the soul of the nation," that "something had changed in America," and thus "the whole idea of 'Americanness'" was up for grabs. Yet to say that "the culture wars often hinged on a more epistemological question about national identity: How should Americans think?" offers too general a claim.[29] Since most humans now live in societies defined as nation states, almost any question before public policy can be dubbed a struggle for the soul, the identity, the meaning of "America" or other national entity. Despite all talk of the global, nationalism remains one of the paramount ideologies of the contemporary world, and distinctive histories of national formation in different geographic and cultural settings bear significantly on ensembles of belief and practice typically identified as "heritage," ensembles that become in turn influential in socializing individual identity. Yet any attempt to actually give descriptive content to such ensembles and identities is notoriously uncertain and debatable; one person's (or party's) "American" trait is another's "un-American" deviation, and that can surely be said of other nationalities. "Americanness" may very well be considered an empty (or nearly empty) signifier; since filling it with content is inevitably and always a matter of debate, it remains a word, not a thing.

As in the case of culture wars, the question of what makes "the meaning of America" more or less salient or poignant at particular times is the one that demands analysis and explanation. At one point, Hartman suggests that the

[28] Talcott Parsons, thinking of his own experience of the 1920s, made "fundamentalist reaction" a generic concept in analyzing the discontents of modernization. See Talcott Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory*, rev. edn (New York, 1954), 119–23, 137–8. Even an up-to-date college textbook such as John Mack Faragher, Mari Jo Buhle, Daniel Czitrom, and Susan H. Armitage, *Out of Many: A History of the American People*, 3rd edn (Saddle River, 2000), 692, classes Prohibition, immigration restriction, the Klan, and religious fundamentalism as "resistance to modernity" rooted primarily in the antiurban sentiments of "rural and small-town America," thus disregarding upper-class nativism, big-business anticommunism, and the Klan in the cities.

[29] Schultz, *Buckley and Mailer*, 4, 228; Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 225, 223.

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war over the *National Standards for History* in the 1990s was in part fueled by "the loss of national purpose that accompanied the end of the Cold War"—not an implausible claim but one that calls for further elaboration in relation to the 1970s and 1980s, when the Cold War still reigned.[30] Perhaps, however, the disturbance caused by 1960s dissent was peculiarly intense, yielding a prolonged "culture war" in its aftermath, precisely because a long period devoted to building national consciousness preceded it. The period running from the 1930s through the 1950s gave special impetus to ventures in cultural nation building in the United States, due to combined and varied motivating forces stemming from the Depression-bred demands for governmental action on a national scale, the rise of modern folklore studies and canon building in "American literature," the reigning holistic conceptual framework of the social sciences, morale building for war, and the self-conscious ideological projects of mounting a Cold War. Coming at the culmination of this period, the 1950s can be considered as much an "age of ideology" (in the sense of Richard Hofstadter's judgment that "America" didn't "have" ideologies because it *was* one) as the "end of ideology."[31] Such surges of cultural nation building can only be provisional accomplishments, and to some extent 1960s protest—but especially the black freedom struggle—genuinely shook what had, it appeared, been secured just recently. A few observers such as James Baldwin, however, knew how unstable a compound "American culture" really was. Aside from an ensemble of human relations and affections at a particular moment of historical flux, it hardly *existed* as an identifiable thing; it could only be *achieved* as something to be wrought in the future by action now. Otherwise, there is no soul, and every retrospective appeal to "make America great again" alludes to a phantasm. Attempts to realize that fantasy are as likely to spell disaster as salvation. Certain culture wars are dead; the discourse of national decline persists. More battles will come.

[30] Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 276.

[31] Hofstadter quoted in Hans Kohn, *American Nationalism: An Interpretive Essay* (New York, 1956), 13.

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