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On Rogers Smith's *Civic Ideals*

Rogers Smith's *Civic Ideals* is a grand project and an impressive achievement. As one expects from Smith's work, it combines scholarship and moral seriousness, and the effort to relate theory to practice, the present to the past. Notable for Smith's command of the details of policy – court decisions, statutes, and administrative history – *Civic Ideals* is also an invitation to rethink the nature of the United States as a political society, an inquiry into our political identity and purpose.

Smith asks the great American political question: how, and in what respects, are Americans a "people"? The Declaration of Independence, our guide in so many things, does not address the puzzle, simply postulating that the colonists are "one people." Yet this claim to civic identity is crucial to the Declaration's argument, because the first natural right it asserts is the *collective* claim of a people to a "separate and equal station."[1] Even at the beginning, America was something of an enigma, a many that is somehow one.

Rightly, Smith rejects efforts to simplify the American mystery. The theme of *Civic Ideals* is that America is not to be explained in terms of an overwhelming liberal-democratic tradition, a view Smith attributes to Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: Rather, Smith argues, American politics has featured conflicts and complex syntheses of "multiple traditions," in which liberal democracy and republicanism – both of which, Smith claims, see citizenship as a "human creation" resting on the "consent of all involved" – have been blended with "illiberal and undemocratic" doctrines, hierarchies "ascribed" on the

1. Smith's account of collective identity, which points to a "colonial elite," fearful that the British would not support its rule over Indians, blacks, and poor whites, seems dubious (*Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History,* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997], 13). Smith's version omits the popular resistance to the Stamp Act that caught many members of the elite unprepared (John C. Miller, *The Origins of the American Revolution,* [Boston: Little Brown, 1943]). Madison treats opposition to the British as crucial, and the most important "nationalizing factor" may have been that the imperial government dealt with the colonies out of a single ministry (Madison, *The Federalist,* No. 49).

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basis of group characteristics, especially race and gender, or deriving from inegalitarian religious creeds. These illiberalities persist, Smith observes, because they speak to perennial human and political needs that liberal democracies ignore at their peril.

Liberalism, premised on ideas of universal rights, has difficulty assigning any morally compelling character, beyond the claims of interest, to any particular political society, so that on its own terms, it finds it hard or impossible to ask for sacrifice in the name of the common good. Republicanism, emphasizing equality, assigns greater dignity to public life. In the first place, however, the demands of civic equality run against a good many moral proprieties – our private loves and loyalties, for example, or the common sense observation that not all contributions to civic life are of equal worth. Moreover, like liberalism, equality, if asserted as a *human* characteristic, does not provide or define political boundaries or civic identity.[2] Consequently, Smith notes, Americans have felt the need, beyond liberal republicanism, for beliefs and teachings that purport to discover the distinctness and special moral worth of Americans as a people, supporting *strong* moral order and political community, both in the relation of one American to another and to the claims of the community as a whole.

Although Smith prefers to emphasize the uneasy syntheses so common in practice, he knows that, in principle, there is a difference between those nonliberal doctrines that proclaim America's "providential mission" and those that discern political community in "blood," the ascriptions of race and gender. The first define a polity by reference to moral *duty,* and while they lead easily to self-righteousness and imperialism, they also can prompt feelings of guilt and obligation; the second are more inclined to the language of innate qualities and *rights.*

Smith also recognizes that ascriptive categories, on their own terms, fail as definitions of distinct political community. "Maleness" encompasses roughly half of humanity; the "white race," even narrowly defined, would leave America united to Europe; Christianity – or even Protestantism – would link Americans even more broadly; "Anglo-Saxon civilization" would not account for our separation from England. Ascriptions, in other words, can at best offer only partial, inadequate accounts of what America *is.* American nationality – along with a handful of others around the world – is not rooted in an immemorial bond of people to place and to one another. Here, the language of motherland or fatherland, the union of blood and soil, is necessarily uneasy: Native Americans aside, we are all *from* somewhere else, a movement that took place in historic, remembered time, so that our relationships to one another are more or less contingent, with a strong note of volition.[3] This became es-

2. Equality, of course, is compatible with relationships in a closed community. In antiquity, it was Sparta, not Athens, that symbolized *isokratia.*

3. Historically, of course, this has provided a special reason for excluding Native Americans, who lack the memory of migration. Myths about migration to America emphasize the quest for liberty; in *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* Mark Twain had his illustrator point to exploitation, showing Columbus arriving at an island bearing the sign, "Lots Sold on Easy Terms" ([New York: Norton, 1980], 113).

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pecially true after 1776, because independence, as Smith observes, involved breaking the bond of "natural allegiance" to the crown, and with it, the "natural" claims of patriarchal authority, so linked to the claims of monarchy, defining both as mere conventions, subordinate to natural right.[4] So that while Smith rehearses the long story of ascriptive notions, his high goal is a definition of citizenship able to rival their appeal and their public force, one that speaks truly to the facts of American history and life.

Still, despite Smith's originality, there is less distance than he implies between his views and those of the theorists he criticizes. He has little trouble, of course, in contrasting his position to Louis Hartz's wonderfully provocative, intentionally monocular romp through American intellectual history in *The Liberal Tradition in America.* (The book – as Smith points out – was not written to celebrate "irrational Lockeanism" so much as to encourage Americans to grow beyond it, especially in relation to foreign affairs.[5]) But when Smith acknowledges the "important truths" in Philip Gleason's argument that America's official doctrine, with its reliance on universal principles and natural right, worked to overcome the "latent predisposition" toward a more ethnic view, he bows to a position very like Myrdal's. And Smith's contention that Gleason fails to give "due weight" to those inegalitarian elements makes a distinction that seems more marginal than substantial.[6]

The problem is clearest where Tocqueville is concerned, for Tocqueville, who presented American political culture as a delicate (and historically tipping) balance between "the spirit of liberty" and the "spirit of religion" cannot really be accused of seeing only one tradition in America.[7] And of course, Tocqueville was extraordinarily attentive to the relation between race, gender, and democratic quality; Smith's concession, that Tocqueville "did ultimately discuss" these issues "more than many of his successors," seems much too grudging.[8]

About race, Tocqueville was rather too pessimistic, even by Smith's standards, too inclined to discount the strength of liberal democratic norms.[9] Certainly, Tocqueville noticed the American construction of race: Beaumont's novel, *Marie,* to which Tocqueville refers his readers, turns on the tragic absurdity of the American "one drop" rule.[10]

4. Outside convention, Locke had argued, authority over children rests with both parents, rather than the father alone (*Second Treatise on Civil Government* ¶53). Smith notes that even in colonial America, women were regarded as the "governesses of the household." (Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 69).

5. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955).

6. Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 14–15; from time to time, Smith points to the fact that official doctrine, which might be expected to buttress the establishment, has been available to the disadvantaged (for example, see 243).

7. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Knopf, 1980), 1:43–44; and this says nothing about Tocqueville's reference to an aristocratic substratum beneath a "surface covering of democracy." (1:48, 272–80).

8. Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 18.

9. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* 1:356–81; see also 1:261 n.4; Smith comments on Tocqueville's pessimism (Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 21).

10. *Marie: or, Slavery in the United States,* trans. Barbara Chapman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958).

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Both Beaumont and Tocqueville, moreover, were struck by the problematic American ambivalence toward women. Tocqueville seems to have accepted, and certainly found good things to say about, the American practice of excluding women from politics, leaving them the governance of the home. Still, his chapter title, "How Americans Understand the Equality of the Sexes," reminds us that Americans were constrained to *speak* in terms of equality.[11] And in noting the greater role of women in selecting their husbands, and their greater freedom in pre-marital social life, Tocqueville and Beaumont recognized that choosing a husband required at least a consumer's knowledge of "masculine" affairs and qualities that, in Europe, would have been thought unseemly in a woman. "Instead, then of inculcating mistrust of herself, they constantly seek to enhance her confidence in her own strength of character." Given "a precocious knowledge of all subjects," the typical American woman "views the vices of society without illusion and braves them without fear."[12] Excluded *from* politics, American women were taught *about* it, and could even discourse on the subject.[13] Yet, as Beaumont and Tocqueville observed in their different ways, these young women, accustomed to relative freedom, were expected, after marriage, to confine themselves to the domestic sphere – ceasing to be free, Beaumont commented, at precisely the moment when, in France, their counterparts became so.[14] The tension or contradiction in a role so defined is obvious, and suggests a long-term instability, since marriage changed only a woman's "part" and "habits": "her character is the same."[15] And if Tocqueville thought that the "most virtuous" women accepted their subordination, he was careful to indicate that there were others who merely remained silent, out of deference to opinion.[16] It does not take hindsight to see trouble down a road so described, and at no very great remove.

Moreover, Tocqueville – convinced, like Smith, that liberalism affords only an incomplete foundation for liberal politics – worried that the religio-republican dimension of the American tradition would, in the long term, be eroded by the Constitution and the laws. "Before becoming a cause," Guizot had written, "political institutions are an effect"; Tocqueville followed that maxim in his observation that, in the short term, habits are more important than laws. He also saw, however, the other implication of Guizot's remark: that once established, political institutions acquire a causal force of their own.[17] And he shared Smith's conviction that the Constitution would shape American civic identity into the forms appropriate for a large, commercial republic.[18]

The American Framers rejected the old republicanism, which had envisaged a diverse and open *politics* secured and supported by a closed, homogenous *society*.[19] They planned a new republicanism, in which an open, diverse

11. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* 2:211–14. 12. Ibid., 2:198–99.
13. Ibid., 1:250. 14. See Tocqueville's observation on the point, ibid., 2:201–3.
15. Ibid., 2:203, 214. 16. Ibid., 2:212.
17. I cite Guizot from Larry Siedentop, *Tocqueville* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 23.
18. Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 120.
19. Compare Tocqueville's image, *Democracy in America,* 1:43–44.

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society would be framed by a relatively closed *politics*.[20] American society in the eighteenth century may look coherent in retrospect, but it was notable for religious rivalries, for ethnic hostilities and, especially, by the conflict of cultures between slave states and free. These very diversities, in the familiar argument of *The Federalist* No.10, demand majorities that are complex coalitions, and hence more or less moderate, and the design of the Constitution works to limit political possibility and public enthusiasm. This aspect of the laws is enhanced by the fact that the Constitution not only forbids an establishment of religion, it is silent on the subject of natural rights, making only the most prosaic of moral claims. And since, in so vast a republic, any group must learn to cooperate with diverse others in any important endeavor, the regime works to undermine ethnic and local insularities as the price of power. In general, "the silent operation of the laws" – the institutionalized rivalry of interests in a regime of great scale and diversity – undermines attachments, moderates political passions, and promotes a circumspect and ordered liberty.[21] And as Smith argues, the Framers expected that public spirit, in the discipline of the laws, resting on the appeal to rights and interest, would ordinarily be "diffuse," incapable of inspiring civic nobilities except possibly in time of war and crisis, and not reliably even then.[22]

The Framers relied, however, on a more substantial, "thicker" morality inculcated by civil society. They saw a need for citizens who regard contracts – and especially, the social contract – as sacred, secure against all but the most extreme temptations to break promises once made. "The taking away of God . . . though but even in thought, dissolves all," Locke had declared, and though the American founders were less dogmatic, they came close. (The "obligation of contracts," after all, is the only duty even mentioned in the Constitution.[23]) The Framers also hoped for a certain civic spirit about one's rights – they probably would have called it "manliness" – to prompt a determination to defend those rights even at the price of comfort and risk, even including a willingness to *sacrifice* one's life or interests to preserve the rightful freedom of *others*. Arguing on behalf of the defendants in the Boston Massacre, John Adams appealed to the unqualified claims of self-preservation and the right to kill anyone who threatens one's own life. "That is a point," Adams declaimed, "I would not give up for my right hand, nay for my life."[24] It was a conviction, evidently, that did not arise spontaneously from Adams's theory; it was, however, one the Framers saw as a moral cornerstone of liberal republican citizenship. Finally, the Framers expected or desired a generosity of spirit that expresses itself especially in care for the helpless and dependent, but which also points toward an inclusive humanitarianism. Even in the "civ-

20. I have made this argument in "Democratic Multiculturalism," in *Multiculturalism and Democracy,* ed. Arthur Melzer, Jerry Weinberger and M. Richard Zinman (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 120–29.

21. *The Writings of James Madison,* ed. Gaillard Hunt (New York: Putnam, 1900–1910), 6:86.

22. *The Federalist* No. 49.

23. John Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1955), 52.

24. *The Legal Papers of John Adams,* ed. L. Kinvin Wroth and Hiller B. Zobel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 3:254.

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ilized parts" of the ancient world, Locke observed, reason had been insufficient to convince parents that they should not kill children by exposing them. Forbidding infanticide, religion is *consistent* with reason, but extends its obligations and gives them force.[25]

All of these moral teachings and qualities depended on early education and habituation, a kind of birthright suited and even necessary to a free and rational society, but not strictly rational or based on consent. Like Smith, the Framers saw a need for a sense of obligation and commonality stronger than anything liberalism can supply. Largely, they left the task of moral instruction to society, and to some extent they took it for granted, but they saw clearly enough the need for a liberal version of Smith's alternate traditions.

So, in fact, does Smith. Lockean liberalism does not demand inclusiveness toward outsiders: it proclaims a universal right to make contracts and to apply for inclusion in existing ones, but it does not include a right to be accepted. Quite the contrary, it is perfectly consistent with liberal doctrine to exclude applicants for citizenship on the ground of interest, the desire to protect one's safety and well-being. And there really is no reason why liberals cannot exclude on the basis of an essentially arbitrary freedom to choose one's confederates.

Equating liberalism with inclusiveness, as Smith tends to do, involves at least a Kantian emendation, a categorical imperative as a principle of duty, an inarticulate premise of humanitarianism and a sense of obligation, however soft, to one's species, to others who stand outside any existing relation of contract. Smith notes that the idea of birthright citizenship has often been the refuge of radicals, and that (in cases like *Yick Wo v. Hopkins* or *U.S. v. Wong Kim Ark*) it has been a barrier to racial exclusion. This shows, Smith comments, that ascription can be "humanely inclusive as well as exclusive."[26] Indeed it can: the very idea of human rights rests on an ascription, the doctrine that "humanity" is both distinct and endowed with moral claims. An unstated humanitarian premise also underlies that commonplace American fallacy, the belief that moral relativism entails tolerance, a notion which makes logical sense only if one adds to the argument a universalistic first principle akin to the Golden Rule.[27]

Tocqueville indicated, however, that both the structure and the official teachings of American politics tend to mute that religio-republican voice. Americans, he observed, sometimes act in ways that are public spirited or even altruistic, but they almost invariably explain and justify their acts in the language of "self interest rightly understood." They are, Tocqueville concluded, "more anxious to do honor to their philosophy than to themselves."[28] He was ignoring the exceptions, of course, in order to highlight the tenden-

25. John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity,* ed. I.T. Ramsey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), 64.

26. Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 306,445.

27. Bertrand de Jouvenel, *Sovereignty: An Inquiry into the Political Good* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1997), 349–50.

28. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* 2:122.

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cy of public discourse to follow the Constitution and the market, and hence the doctrine that all human beings act from interest, more or less amply defined, checked only by the interests of others.[29]

Tocqueville appreciated the solidity of "interest rightly understood," but he also recognized that, dominating public language, that doctrine would increasingly define American self-understanding, slowly eroding the "spirit of religion," and with it, ideas of duty and community.

But in Tocqueville's theorizing, the soul has needs which do not disappear with a loss of its power of speech. The soul will express itself from time to time in civil life, and if left untrained and inarticulate, it will break out like an escaped prisoner, in a kind of madness.[30] Tocqueville's principle speaks to the perennial yearning for closer-knit society and for a deeper unity of belief and feeling – possible to only a limited extent in any modern state, especially a large one – that, as Smith contends, shadows liberal regimes. And although when Tocqueville spoke of "religious insanity," he was thinking of millenarian sects and revivalism generally, his observation applies to political utopianism – left and right – and to the efforts to impose ascriptive ideas of civic identity, Smith's distinctive concern, as part of the quest for community. Arguing for better answers to that enduring need, Smith is following Tocqueville's implicit prescription to rearticulate politically the language of the soul. In this, as in many things, the differences between Smith and Tocqueville – who, Smith acknowledges, may prove right about the "trajectory" of American political history – seem less significant than their commonalities.[31]

* * *

Smith's shrewd treatment of American political history reflects his theoretical concerns. He has a relatively high esteem for the Confederation era, with its version of the ideal of the small republic, and for the Reconstruction, which gave us the textual bases for national citizenship. Those conflicting grails – the intimate community of participants and an impersonal citizenry defined by rights – suggest Smith's appreciation for the ambiguities and his recognition of the danger in any zeal for coherence. Repeatedly, he illustrates the amalgam of inclusion and exclusivity in American political movements – the Jeffersonian combination of democratic sympathy and, in the end, support for immigrants, with "civic racism" in relation to slavery and agrarian expansion at the expense of the tribes; the zeal for civic participation and the suspicion of corporations that characterized Jacksonian America, linked to its deepening racism and its vaulting nationalism; and so on, until Smith brings his story to a close in the progressive era, just before World War I, with a movement that shaped the new American state and strengthened any number of

29. For example, see *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson,* ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: Modern Library, 1944), 575.

30. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* 1:310; 2:20–26, 134–35, 148.

31. Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 472.

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democratic impulses, but also – despite the notable gains of women – reached what may have been the nadir of American race relations.

His decision to end with the Progressives leaves the obvious question, why here, before the National Origins Quota? And before other events, such as the Japanese relocation during World War II, that would have added new dimensions to Smith's thesis? The answer, apparently, is that Smith sees subsequent American political discussion as shaped by alternative versions of progressive doctrine: a "Centrist" school, typified by Herbert Croly, that sought a democratic but scientifically guided nation, culturally unified around North European norms; and the "left Progressives" – Dewey and DuBois, somewhat ambivalently, as well as such thinkers as Bourne, Kallen, and Gilman, more oriented to pluralism and participation – a tradition Smith sees as pointing to the civil rights and women's movements, and to the Great Society. I would have liked to read Smith's treatment of any number of subsequent events, but his case for ending his historical analysis in 1912 makes sense, and on the whole, I think he is probably right about the post-Progressive pattern of American thought and policy.

Of course, I have some quarrels with Smith's account. Sometimes his analysis of events is oddly skewed. For example, he contends that most white Americans must have approved the Court's position in the Dred Scott case because, even in the free state of Illinois, Lincoln "barely won" the popular vote against Douglas – eventually losing, of course, in the state legislature.[32] Smith is almost certainly right about white opinion, but Lincoln's popular victory in a state with significant pro-Southern elements was a stunning upset, an ex-Congressman edging the Democratic heir-apparent, equivalent to the shock Lyndon Johnson received in New Hampshire in 1968.

But this is really a cavil. More seriously, Smith sometimes underrates the extent to which American thinkers felt comfortable in conciliating popular prejudices because, following Madison, they confided that the long term, structural dynamics of the regime work against bigotry. For example, Smith calls attention to Paine's appeal, in *Common Sense,* to the religious biases of his broader audience. But Paine, who disdained such ideas, was careful to point toward a universalist principle: after announcing that in America, "we claim brotherhood with every European Christian," Paine goes on to add, "It is pleasant to observe by what regular gradations we surmount the force of local prejudices, as we enlarge our acquaintance with the world."[33] He indicates no limits to this process short of humanity itself, suggesting – at least to his enlightened readers – that even American narrow-mindedness, powerful in immediate practice, would eventually be overcome.

Smith rejoins, if Paine is a universalist, why is he "insensitive" to the "plain case" his principles make for gender equality?[34] Paine's own response, I think, is clear enough: in a broad sense, Paine believed in human equality, but he regarded "Male and female" as "the distinctions of nature" – unlike the dif-

32. Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 271.
33. *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine,* ed. Philip Foner (New York: Citadel, 1969), 1:19.
34. Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 111.

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ference between rich and poor, which "can be accounted for" by reference to reason and utility without the "harsh, ill-sounding names of oppression and avarice," and the distinction between good and evil, which depends on "heaven," which for Paine meant superstition, priestcraft, and arbitrary judgement.[35] Bodily distinctions, in other words, rank as natural in liberal theory, a fact which opens the door to natural history and later ideas of scientific racism. Paine also identified women with a natural love for their own and for the past (and especially, religion), with the particular and the familiar, which he attributed in part to convention, but also to biology – so that paradoxically, Enlightenment universalism contributed to notions that women's equal place should be the home.[36]

Smith also occasionally understates the complex effects of market economics, which ordinarily work in favor of an aqualitative, inclusive individualism, but are sometimes allied with or even contribute to ascriptive impulses. Criticizing Michael Rogin's view of Jacksonianism, in relation to Native Americans and Mexicans, as primarily driven by the demands of market freedom, though also impelled to at least pretend to paternal concern, Smith asks, if market growth was the issue, why did elites not pursue expansion "strictly through consensually negotiated contracts and treaties with the tribes and with Mexicans" based on principles of free labor and equality?[37] It is to smile. Elites have always known that economics depends on a political framework, that all economics are political economics. They regarded the governments of Mexico and the tribes as less-than-reliable upholders of commercial rights, especially since both operated under systems of law significantly at odds with the codes of liberal capitalism. Capitalism, after all, shatters and reshapes ways of life, following a logic that is implicitly violent in creating – as Marx and Engels said in the *Manifesto* – "a world after its own image."

Similarly, I am inclined to think that Smith is too quick to dismiss Morton Keller's claim that the primary dynamic of the Gilded Age was the confrontation with industrialism. This is especially true because Smith recognizes the relationship between the attraction of ascriptive citizenship and the anxieties produced by industrialism's disordering of communities and systems of status. In fact, in several ways, a focus on industrialism might strengthen Smith's case. Oddly, Smith does not discuss the rise of anti-Semitism, so associated with worries about status, especially in elite circles. (Smith's only reference to Henry Adams, that distinguished anti-Semite, speaks only of his despair in the face of the theory of evolution.[38]) And there is some evidence that in the industrial era, as men became wage-earners and hence visibly dependent in economic life, they became more attached to ideas of male virility and independence, a fantasy that strengthened the need to see women as dependent beings.

35. *Complete Writings of Thomas Paine,* 1:9.
36. See my essay, "Civil Religion in the Age of Reason," *Social Research* 54 (1987):447–90.
37. Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 200. 38. Ibid., 350.

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Most important, Smith – who wants to urge on contemporary liberals the need for myth and the sense of membership in a "people" endowed with collective moral claims – seems uneasy with the very idea of an American political culture, or of political culture generally. His index, for example, includes an entry to "cultural pluralism" but not to "culture," and his preference for terms like "civic identity" in "historical *enterprises*" (my emphasis) suggests that he is more comfortable with the fundamentally individualistic languages of liberalism. Consequently, he has trouble taking seriously the truth claims of any concern for the distinct qualities of American culture (although he concedes that the advocates of ascriptive views often believed – and believe – in their truth.)

For example, Jefferson, without being willing to exclude immigrants by law, worried in his earlier writings that people raised in absolute monarchies or despotisms would not have the sort of character appropriate to republican government, especially the habit of civic responsibility, concluding that such migration should not be encouraged. Smith notes that this argument paralleled the desire to define citizenship ascriptively, and so it did.[39] But Jefferson's argument also makes sense. It raises the question, what are the cultural prerequisites of citizenship? How far can a given culture find accommodation, or survive, within a liberal republic? One need not be Pat Buchanan to think that a mass migration of members of the Taliban might cause a few strains in American culture, though probably more for the Taliban's adherents.

Culture is no fiction, although it is less omnipotent than social scientists are apt to suggest these days. It refers to institutions in the widest sense – to habits and memories and attachments, patterns of behaving, thinking, and speaking widespread enough to be taken as characteristic and the basis of expectations, not universal, but reliable in everyday life. It includes some account of how this collectivity came to be, its version of the presence of the past, but it must also find a way of dealing with change, linking past and present to the future. *Identity,* in persons or societies, presumes that there are some core principles, some essential continuities that cannot change if the thing is to remain itself. And the effort to discern and preserve civic identity is a defining task of politics.

In the ongoing effort to define Americans as a people, the great question has been whether – or better, at what cost and with what benefits – newcomers and previously excluded groups can be included in American life and allegiance?[40] (This includes the question, can America transmit its essential heritage to those perennial outsiders, the children of its citizens?) Does inclusion, as Jefferson worried, threaten values or "habits of the heart" vital to democratic life? And what are the costs and benefits of inclusion to the culture of the group? For both America and erstwhile outsiders, accommodation brings gifts, but only at a price.

39. Ibid., 96.

40. Smith's argument calls to mind Karl Deutsch's *Nationalism and Social Communication* (New York: Technology Press, 1953).

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In one sense, our common culture – never robust, given our large and changing regime – has grown thinner with time, more diverse ethnically and religiously, particularly given our new sensibilities on issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Consider how Protestant America became first Christian and then Judeo-Christian; and these days, Muslims, a rapidly growing minority, are coming to seem comparatively familiar.[41] (It needs emphasis that this increase in diversity, with all its ebbs and flows, has been continuous in American history, helping to prompt that nervous anxiety and passion for ascriptive identity that Charlotte Perkins Gilman called "Americanitis.")[42] Today, evidently, American pluralism is growing ever more complicated, featuring conflicting and overlapping allegiances, such as the gay and lesbian Irish Catholics who challenge the Hibernian Society every St. Patrick's Day. Cultural pluralism is a fact in any modern regime, and it makes assembling any national narrative – or any list of cultural commonalities – a challenge of titanic difficulty.

At the same time, American unity is also "thicker" in vital ways, drawn together by economics, technology, and law so that locality and local community are diminishing in importance, and even very vocal cultures are often reduced to matters of style. This, too, has been a more or less continuous story in American history, the material side of the dynamic that, along with public schools and democratic politics, has moved acculturation. Even when successful, this process has not been unidirectional, as Smith indicates in his fine appreciation of the pubic schools, institutions designed in the interest of Protestant hegemony that also have afforded weapons and opportunities to the disadvantaged.[43]

Still, it is hard, these days, to feel much confidence in the historic forges of civic identity. American schools are fragmenting if not decaying. And although economics and technology are making our lives more alike, they are doing so by destabilizing relationships and overrunning borders, creating a world in which Tocqueville's grim vision of individualism comes closer to realization.[44] Corporate "citizenship," lacking any significant tie to place or country, now constitutes a kind of standard for civic relationships that seem remarkably abstract. In fact, contemporary economics and technology increasingly present dominations and powers beyond the control of the state, rendering even the idea of self-government problematic. Government, meanwhile, seems alternately impotent and overwhelming, and society seems increasingly divided between the exempt, who move in a world beyond the sphere of the state, and the trapped, who are still dependent on it.

The easy solution, as Smith's analysis suggests, is to seek civic unity through negation, making our unlikenesses pale when compared to the greater un-

41. Islam is a "heresy," Pat Robertson writes, but "at least it springs from the Bible" and is not a "totally alien religion" (*The New Millennium* [Dallas: Word, 1990], 86).

42. Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 455. 43. Ibid., 322, 324.

44. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* 2:99.

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likeness of some exotic, whether the domestic outsider we exclude from citizenship or the foreign outsider who justifies including our erstwhile "inferiors." Ending in 1912, Smith's history essentially precedes the era of Great Power foreign policy in America, omitting the way in which the foreign enemy was thought to demand the elimination of "hyphenated Americans" in World War I and seen as a reason for celebrating ethnic diversity (at least, among whites) during World War II, as well as the effect of the cold war in helping to "mainstream" Catholics and to provide arguments in favor of greater racial equality. In any case, there are certainly temptations, today, to try to build a sense of civic unity around opposition to terrorists, or some other convenient threat.

Smith's argument has some inclinations in that direction. His view of politics is essentially liberal and voluntarist, with institutions shaped by elites – "perhaps guided, certainly limited, but not ultimately determined by nature," a position to which both Madison and Aristotle could have agreed – but with purposes broadened beyond those of the elites by the need to enlist the loyalties of a membership that, in principle, derives from choice. That view, however, does not lend itself to ideas of "distinct peoplehood," and Smith's arguments for such a conviction of political identity point heavily to outsiders: without some such sense of commonality, Smith comments, a regime is "not likely to compete for power successfully" against "more particularist political visions," a stance underlined by his reference to the need for a "fighting faith."[45] But Smith is too aware of the dangers of unity built around enemies to go very far down that road.

Rather, he prefers the image of political communities as akin to political parties, although with higher moral stakes, capable of eliciting loyalty but still limited parts of a whole. This argument is both imaginative and profoundly Aristotelian, for Aristotle held that all regimes, short of the ideal, are to some extent partisan, esteeming certain contributions and goods more highly than others and tilting the scales of justice, if only slightly, in an egalitarian or distributive direction. And just as Aristotle maintained that the wise *polis* moderates its own partisanship, so – as Smith indicates – the wise party recognizes the legitimacy of its opposition.[46]

The party, of course, is also intended for combat, but it can be something more. The country, Senator Plunkitt remarked, was built up by the political parties: in the interest of victory, parties worked to build coalitions that unified ethnicities and interests, but also taught the norms and civilities of democratic politics.[47] That contribution, however, presumes a set of ruling institutions and standards above party that govern and tame it, so that Smith's appeal to party as the model of politics implicitly points to the need for a universal or natural standard of justice, something that Smith, at least nominally, wants to reject.

Smith's critique of other contemporary answers, however, is trenchant, just this side of devastating. Staking out a middle ground between "Universal In-

45. Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 6, 9, 13, 502. 46. Ibid., 495–96.
47. William Riordon, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* (New York: Dutton, 1963), 13.

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tegrationists" (Rawls) and "Separatist Pluralists" (Iris Young and Will Kymlicka), he has little difficulty in showing Rawls's "evasions" on the question of civic identity as well as the fact that Rawls's state, on Rawls's terms, is not ultimately neutral. As for the "separatists," Smith shows that in their distinct ways, both Young and Kymlicka expect the plural groups they champion to be part of a deliberative public based on mutual respect, but offer no serious account of how such a public would come to be, or how it would deal with any group that refuses to accept the rules of civility. (Such theories are even less adequate in explaining whether, or how, groups would be compelled *internally* to respect human rights or to practice democracy, especially if either runs against the culture of the group itself.) Separatist pluralism, in other words, rests on implicit universals, quite outside and at odds with its theory. In terms of that theory, moreover, separatist pluralism slides easily into perspectivism, and hence to the doctrine that the increasing diversity of human situations and standpoints in modern society requires and legitimates a growing diversity of morals and judgments and a shrinking of the sphere of public authority. This, in turn, points to an ever-growing disorder which is bound to prove ultimately intolerable: it builds, in fact, a highway to despotism.[48]

Smith himself prefers to argue in contemporary terms, rejecting any "unchanging, transcendental grounds" (or "natural or divine moral order," terms he appears to regard as equivalent) for political values or society. However, he defines the liberal aim as the effort to enhance the capacity of individuals for personal and collective self-governance, going on to say that it is "reasonable" to call this a "constitutive feature of any defensible view of human flourishing and any worthwhile political philosophy."[49] This amounts to saying that, while Smith rejects an "unchanging, transcendental" basis for liberalism if proclaimed *dogmatically,* he is quite willing to assert one *reasonably,* even militantly, but with proper deference to human frailty and uncertainty.

In the same spirit, he confides that American history is sufficiently compelling when told accurately and honestly to rival or surpass "ascriptive myths of national superiority."[50] National history, he argues, can make a place even for bleak truths, and its glory may be the greater precisely because it does not pretend to be unblemished. This is a grand, anciently American and Protestant vision, with its emphasis on avoiding shams and self-deceptions.[51] It holds that America's dignity lies in a human reality beyond myths and customs, and Smith's "party of America" is like nothing so much as Franklin's "party of virtue," unique in its immunity to the vanity that disrupts the politics of others.[52] But if the American story includes flaws and conflicts, it still, as Smith recognizes, needs a plot. Smith finds that theme, I think, in the spirit of Gettysburg, a dedication to equal citizenship in a struggle the outcome of which

48. Jouvenel, *Sovereignty,* 348–49. 49. Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 489; see also 498.

50. Ibid., 497.

51. Steven Ozment, *Protestants: the Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1992); see also Peter L. Berger, "Protestantism and the Quest for Certainty," *Christian Century* 115 (1998):782ff.

52. Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography and Other Writings,* ed. Kenneth Silverman (New York: Penguin, 1986), 105.

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is far from certain. It calls for high courage and dedication to right without guarantees. Moreover, to see oneself in a "collective history," as Smith would have Americans do, is to recognize that human beings are not "born free" but indebted to family and community, to say nothing of the greater past. By claiming the birthright that is citizenship, even by "naturalization," we accept, along with its benefits, our share of the community's debts to those it has wronged – to African Americans, to women, and to the whole, long line of the tormented and oppressed. With that membership goes the knowledge that we cannot be *free* until the debt is discharged.[53]

In fact, we owe Rogers Smith a debt for putting to contemporary words a lyric strain of America's multiple traditions desperately needed by the republic in this uncertain time.

53. Jouvenel, *Sovereignty*, 317.

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