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Americanism

New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal

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★ **In the Shadow of Vietnam**

★ *Liberal Nationalism and the Problem of War*

From Theodore Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill in 1898, through the celebration of the multiethnic World War II platoon, to John F. Kennedy's Cold War patriotism, war figured centrally in the minds of Americans who wished to forge a liberal nation. Twentieth-century wars became occasions for celebrating America's greatness, intensifying popular devotion to its democratic ideals, and opening up the nation to groups that had been on the margins. Wars legitimated the idea of a liberal state, one authorized to remedy economic and social inequities in the name of justice and security. Wartime mobilizations also unleashed repressive instincts, as liberals sought to contain or eliminate those they labeled internal threats. Repression and democratization together bound liberal nationalism ever more tightly to the political dynamics of war.

But most liberals severed their historical connection to war in the 1960s and 1970s when they opposed American involvement in Vietnam. Simultaneously, many also repudiated nationalism, now seeing in it mainly a thrust toward the domination of weaker countries abroad and the subjugation of "lesser" peoples—minorities and women—at home. These liberals turned their political energies instead to a promotion of "multiculturalism" and of groups that Jesse Jackson included in his "Rainbow Coalition"—who gave their primary loyalty to identities grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality rather than to the nation itself.

Many Americans outside the liberal camp associated this turn away from nationalism with their country's decline. Internationally, America had lost its swagger, unable to do much (or so it seemed) against enemies such as the Iranian militants who, in 1979, seized the United States embassy in Teheran and took scores of Americans hostage. Domestically, hyperinflation and growing unemployment accelerated the rusting out of the industrial heartland. When President Jimmy Carter told Americans, in 1978, that they would have to learn to live within limits, he seemed to be pronouncing the death of the American dream.¹

Liberals' estrangement from war and from the American dream loos-

ened their hold on national political power. Democrats won only a single presidential election between 1964 and 1992, and that one (Carter's victory in 1976) was due more to the Watergate scandal that forced President Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974 than to a liberal renaissance. By 1980 Republican Ronald Reagan, America's most important late-twentieth-century politician, had made pride in America critical to his appeal. His nationalism depended centrally on war—the Cold War—and on vanquishing an international enemy, the Soviet Union, that, in his telling, negated everything Americans held dear.

Reagan's success in winning two terms and securing the election of his legate, George H. W. Bush, in 1988, convinced influential groups of liberals that the Democratic Party's return to power depended on re-embracing nationalism and wresting control of it away from the right. Liberal efforts to reappropriate nationalism entailed a variety of initiatives: talking about America in a prideful way; reconceptualizing multiculturalism as a story of diversity within an American unity; rethinking once hard liberal positions—a commitment to the welfare state, affirmative action, and deficit spending—in the interests of gaining support from an imagined American "heartland"; and fashioning a nationalism that was inclusive and tolerant and that did not depend for its appeal, as had earlier versions, on the denunciation and exclusion of "un-Americans."²

But what would these liberals do about the connection of their own history and historical icons—FDR and JFK, in particular—to war? Some believed that liberals who had led the nation into war had betrayed their best instincts and that nothing should be done to resurrect that tradition. In this view, the reformers who best embodied America's liberal ideals were activist-intellectuals who hated war such as Jane Addams, Randolph Bourne, Charles Beard, and a young Bayard Rustin. In the 1940s the historian Charles Beard became a maligned figure because he denounced America's entry into World War II. But in World War I he had been part of a robust and respected antiwar coalition of liberals and radicals. Such figures had argued that war profited big business, made the state too powerful and unaccountable, and undermined civil liberties and tolerance.³

Other liberals essentially ignored the historical connection between liberalism and war, presumably because they regarded it as no more than incidental to the evolution of their cause. Instead they focused on the positive in their efforts to rehabilitate the nation: building community, connectedness, and a vital center; reconciling multiculturalism with a com-

mitment to core American values; and restoring a strong civic life that would tie Americans to each other, build pride in the nation, and expand support for liberal policies.⁴

That uplifting conception of Americanism seemed on the rise by the 1990s. Both the civil rights revolution of the 1960s, which delegitimated racial nationalism, and the collapse of the Soviet Union twenty years later, which removed America's principal adversary from the international arena, enabled many to claim that American nationalism had outgrown its racialist character and its association with war. It was now plausible to think that a kinder and gentler version of Americanism could flourish. But this thesis took a big hit on September 11, 2001. In the aftermath of that day of terror, militant nationalist sentiment in the United States surged, abetted by American-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In light of these developments, the relationship of American nationalism to war deserves a fresh look.

A good place to begin is by examining a small group of celebrated nationalists who, in the 1990s, embraced, through representations of history, a liberal vision of war. We do not often think of these filmmakers, popular historians, and cultural impresarios as articulating a liberal point of view at all. But they did and still do. The leading figures—James McPherson, Stephen Ambrose, Ken Burns, Stephen Spielberg, Ted Turner, and Tom Brokaw—took it upon themselves, in the late 1980s and the 1990s, to immerse Americans in what were the two greatest, most decisive, and most liberal wars in U.S. history: the Civil War and World War II. In their eyes, liberals might reclaim nationalism by reigniting a fascination with liberal wars.

These “war and nationalism” liberals deserve more attention for their role in reinvigorating liberal nationalism than they have yet received. They undertook sophisticated efforts to imbue their war stories with liberal content. They possessed a better appreciation for the importance of war to the making of the American nation than did liberals who ignored the question. Most significantly, in the character of the citizen soldier, these liberals crafted an emblematic American who fought not out of hate or an urge to dominate but out of patriotic duty and a commitment to republican values. A tolerant and decent nationalism, they seemed to argue, could be achieved through wars fought for just goals and by altruistic warriors.

By recovering the figure of the citizen soldier and celebrating his exploits, these liberals drew attention to a critical, though largely ignored, development in the post-Vietnam American way of war: the turn away

from the citizen soldier and the embrace, instead, of the professional warrior. When the Nixon administration discarded the draft and established an All-Volunteer Force in its place, it ended a tradition of citizen soldiering that had begun two hundred years before as a way to forestall the establishment of the kind of professional army we have today. “Standing armies”—the eighteenth-century term for professional ones—were thought to corrupt governments, encourage military adventurism, and undermine republics. By celebrating the citizen soldier, the “war and nationalism” liberals of the 1990s positioned themselves to launch a patriotic critique of the country's professionalized military—and of the kind of adventurist foreign policy that the establishment of such a military has helped make possible. In the process, they may have strengthened the credibility of a distinctly liberal approach to nationalism.

But such a critique did not, in fact, emerge. The “war and nationalism” liberals were reluctant or unable to grapple with the consequences of the Vietnam War for American society. That war had raised complicated, painful questions about what constitutes civic duty in a republic at a time of war and how citizen soldiers should behave during a war they deem to be dangerous to their country's future. No liberal nationalism can succeed in twenty-first-century America without confronting the civic and soldiering questions that Vietnam raised. Evading Vietnam did not render useless the kind of nationalism these liberals were trying to create. But it did make their nationalist narratives available to other groups on the political spectrum, particularly those intent on appropriating the narratives for conservative ends.

Interest in the Civil War and World War II ran high long before the 1990s, and books about them sold better than those on any other topics in American history. However, the publication in 1988 of James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (which won a Pulitzer Prize) and in 1994 of Stephen Ambrose's *D-Day: June 6, 1944* markedly boosted the public's desire to learn about the history of those wars.⁵ Ken Burns deepened the interest in the Civil War when, in 1990, he released what was to become one of the most popular documentaries ever shown on the Public Broadcasting System (it was titled simply *The Civil War*). Later that same decade, Stephen Spielberg, who was inspired by Ambrose's work, made the acclaimed, Oscar-winning film *Saving Private Ryan* (1998); he then teamed up with Ambrose and Tom Hanks to produce the HBO series *Band of Brothers* (2001). Ted Turner put the resources of his media empire behind the

making of *Gettysburg*, which came out in 1993, and five years later Tom Brokaw embarked on an energetic and deeply personal print and television campaign to celebrate World War II soldiers and their contemporaries as the "Greatest Generation." By 2001 Brokaw's book trilogy of the same name had sold more than 5 million copies, and his television specials on World War II, often featuring Stephen Ambrose as a narrator or a talking head, had reached audiences in the millions as well.⁶

These figures did not have identical artistic or political agendas. The story of vanquishing an external enemy, Nazi Germany, could not be told the same way as that of the nineteenth-century conflagration that tore America apart. Feature filmmaker Spielberg approached his subject differently than did documentary filmmaker Burns. McPherson remained a more serious scholar than Ambrose. He resisted the lures of celebrity, the hiring of assistants to accelerate the production of his books, and the temptation to become a cheerleader for politicians in power. He also remained a stout liberal, as Ambrose drifted more and more into Republican circles. Nevertheless, these men were engaged in a common project: to place great wars at the center of American history; to find in those wars the leadership, character, and values that made America great; and to use the recovery of these wars' histories to bolster a nationalism that would serve liberal purposes.

The representations of war in the work of these authors and filmmakers shared several principles: first, war is hell, and its physical and psychological horrors have to be vividly conveyed; second, great wars have nevertheless been redeemed by the noble ideals for which they were fought—the elimination of slavery in the Civil War and the defeat of Hitler in World War II—and by the great leaders, such as Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt, who were able to communicate to Americans what was at stake; third, even those Americans on the wrong side of the Civil War—Generals Robert E. Lee and James Longstreet, in *Gettysburg*, for example—fought with virtue and conscience; and, finally, and most important, great wars have been won by citizen soldiers.

The figure of the citizen soldier is crucial to understanding the liberalism of this war-centered nationalism. He is not a professional warrior and has no desire to become one. This sort of exemplary figure may be a gentle and reflective educator in civilian life: Captain James Miller, in *Saving Private Ryan*, is a Pennsylvania schoolteacher, and Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, in *Gettysburg*, is a college professor from Maine. Neither is a military adventurer. They fight because their nation has called

them to service, and their duty must be done. They want to keep America honest and democratic, and the restoration of peace is their goal. They harbor no dreams of imperial glory or of achieving the kind of Roman-scale conquests that motivated General George Patton.⁷ Miller and Chamberlain have a clear understanding of what is at stake—in terms of both the war's overall purpose and the moral vulnerability of the men under their command. Yet they never lose an abhorrence of the death they must inflict and are periodically stricken by crises of conscience about the killing they must undertake. They keep themselves sane by looking forward to the day when their mission will end and they can return to their normal lives.⁸

Like most creations, this figure of the citizen soldier was fashioned out of preexisting cultural materials. Americans have long valued individuals who are thought to be uninterested in wealth, power, or authority but whose ethical core compels them to respond when their community is challenged. In popular culture, such characters have appeared most often in westerns, in the guise of a lone cowboy or gunman who is drawn into the defense of a town's ordinary citizens against outlaws or corrupt officials. The western loner is often a dark figure, or a morally complex one, his separateness intimately bound up with a personal history too painful or dangerous to share with other members of his community. By comparison, the citizen soldier of the war movies is a less complex and more socialized character. He is distinguished not by a past he feels compelled to hide but by the ordinariness of his civilian pursuits. He is simply a good citizen.⁹

Captain John Miller of *Saving Private Ryan*, played by Tom Hanks, is the most fully realized of these citizen soldiers depicted on screen. We encounter him coming ashore with his company of men during the first wave of assaults on the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944. From seeing the tremor in his hand as his boat approaches the beach and then watching as he is dazed and disoriented by an exploding mortar shell soon after he lands, we learn that he is not an indestructible superhero. Yet he collects himself and, through experience, decisiveness, and good judgment, organizes his men to overpower a German redoubt and leads them to safety.

This harrowing episode is merely a prelude to the real story of Spielberg's film: the search for Private James F. Ryan, a paratrooper dropped behind German lines on the eve of D-Day. Because three of his brothers have already died in combat, the top brass orders him to be removed from the theater of war. Captain Miller draws the assignment of finding Ryan and escorting him to safety. From the outset, Miller scorns his mission. He sees no good reason for risking the lives of his men to search for one

unknown individual in an unfamiliar countryside swarming with thousands of enemy soldiers. Yet Miller does not hesitate to assemble a squad and to cross into enemy territory in pursuit of the spectral Ryan.

The search eerily transports the viewers of this World War II movie to another war, Vietnam. Spielberg's cameras linger on Miller's soldiers as they snake through rolling and unknown terrain. They have no idea when and under what circumstances they will find Ryan or encounter the enemy. They might as well be "humping the boonies"—a phrase from the Vietnam War used to describe the patrols of U.S. soldiers who ventured into enemy territory to draw fire, thereby to expose, engage, and defeat the Viet Cong. The climactic moment, when Miller's men threaten to desert him and the mission, also suggests that Spielberg's thoughts about Vietnam have shaped this World War II movie.

All wars generate instances when enlisted men rebel against their officers and sometimes kill them, but the incidence of such events in Vietnam exceeded that of every other war the United States has fought. The frequency of such actions in Vietnam came to symbolize the breakdown of the U.S. military, the despair that engulfed enlisted men who saw no purpose in what they were being told to do, and the repudiation of the values so closely tied to American nationalism—honor, duty, and a belief that it was worth fighting and dying for one's country. To suggest, as Spielberg does, that such sentiments may have entered the minds of the foot soldiers of the Greatest Generation is to enter a potentially subversive terrain of story-telling.¹⁰

In *Saving Private Ryan*, the near rebellion occurs when Miller orders his men to attack a nest of German machine gunners. They are reluctant to attack, but they do and they overwhelm the enemy. In the process, however, they lose one of their men, Private Irwin Wade, a medic, whose painful death constitutes one of the movie's most emotionally wrenching moments. Unnerved and enraged by Wade's death, Miller's men want to kill the German machine gunner they have captured. Miller intervenes to have the German soldier dig a grave for Wade and then to let him go. Infuriated by Miller's act, Private Richard Reiben, the squad's Irish American hothead, declares that he has finished serving on the Ryan mission. When Sergeant Michael Horvath, Miller's loyal noncom, pulls a gun on Reiben, the squad is on the verge of a Vietnam-style climax: American soldiers killing each other rather than obeying their captain and carrying on with their mission.

But Spielberg cannot allow that to happen—not in a movie about the

Greatest Generation. The leadership skills and ethical values of the citizen soldier save the day. Miller manages to subdue his trauma and collect his thoughts, and then he uses the occasion to reveal to his men a closely guarded secret, on which they have been laying bets: his occupation in civilian life. He announces that he is an English teacher in a small Pennsylvania town. To insulate himself against the charge that teaching English might be too effeminate a calling for an army captain, he tells them that he is a baseball coach too.

Miller's revelation catches his men off guard, breaks the murderous mood, and gives Spielberg the opportunity to deliver the film's most important message. Miller admits to his men that he has never believed in the Ryan mission. But if carrying it out earns him the right to go back to his wife, "well that," he says, "makes the mission worth it." In reference to the German machine gunner he refused to kill, he remarks: "Every man I kill, the farther away from home I feel." Moved by the spirit of their citizen-soldier leader, Miller's men all choose to stay with him. Not only will the squad remain unified, but it will find and save Private Ryan, even if the cost, in terms of their own lives, will be high.

It is an extraordinarily moving scene. Yet it also raises tough questions about the strategies Spielberg uses to rekindle patriotism. Two issues in particular invite scrutiny: first, the use of World War II nostalgia to overcome the bitter legacies of Vietnam and, second, the rehabilitation of the all-white, all-male platoon as a prime incubator of American greatness.

Growing up in the 1960s, Spielberg was deeply affected by the war in Vietnam. In a 1998 essay on American war movies written for *Newsweek*, he noted how Vietnam had ruptured his world, both personally and cinematically. Since childhood, he had been fascinated with American war films; indeed, his first movie, made at age fourteen, was an attempt to reenact the glorious World War II battles he and his friends had seen on screen. In that period of 1950s innocence, Spielberg did not doubt the virtue of the United States, the goodness of the wars it had fought, or the nobility and gallantry of those who gave their lives. But then war erupted in Southeast Asia, and, Spielberg recalled, "every Hollywood stereotype [was shattered] when the casualties from Vietnam stormed into our living rooms seven nights a week for nearly a decade." It was not simply that the unceasing stream of deaths disturbed Spielberg, but also "that a new kind of dying was moving our way, uncut and uncensored." Chaos, horrible killing, and cowardice were mixing, and perhaps overwhelming; bravery and glory on the battlefield. It was no longer easy to know what American

soldiers were fighting for—or whether all of them were even fighting. Suddenly, separating the good guys from the bad became a much more complicated matter. In *Saving Private Ryan*, Spielberg's determination to reveal the confusion, brutality, and moral uncertainty of war reveals how profoundly Vietnam had shaped his approach to the subject.¹¹

Why did Spielberg not make a film about the Vietnam War itself? With memorable Vietnam movies, such as *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and *Platoon* (1986), crowding the screens by the 1990s, Spielberg may simply have thought he could more easily make his mark with a cinematic exploration of World War II.¹² But we may also wonder whether Spielberg had another project in mind: to help Americans overcome the trauma of Vietnam by having them focus on a better war.

Several scholars have made this argument, stressing Spielberg's desire, in *Saving Private Ryan*, to end the post-Vietnam crisis of national identity by bringing Americans "home"—to a mythic nation, where individuals are good, republican and patriotic sentiments flourish, and the nation's political energies are harnessed to worthy causes.¹³ The therapeutic power of the film, in this view, derives from Spielberg's ability to link his sensibilities about Vietnam—expressed in the gritty realism of the combat sequences—with his faith in American virtue. Spielberg leads his soldiers through the valley of death but comforts us with the knowledge that his young men, like the nation itself, will be redeemed. His soldiers are reluctant, imperfect heroes. But they are also, in his words, the "dogfaces who freed the world" and made America a great nation.¹⁴

Did the movie help viewers to exorcise the traumas that lingered from Vietnam and "find their way home" to an America they could love and embrace? It's hard to say. But even without knowing how this message was received, one can be troubled by Spielberg's attempt to use World War II to resolve a military and cultural crisis generated by Vietnam. In truth, a movie about World War II does little to help us comprehend what happened in Vietnam. It cannot lead us to understand the reasons for or the consequences of the American defeat in Indochina. It may actually have encouraged some viewers to evade hard questions about Vietnam and to immerse themselves in a nostalgia for the Good War and a better time, when American soldiers served honorably and successfully and made a worthy name for America in the world.

Saving Private Ryan makes no reference to the fact that the Greatest Generation served in a military organized on racist principles; not one African American appears in the three-hour-long movie. What is more, in

the sixteen-plus hours of *Band of Brothers*, only one black face can be seen. In a narrow sense, this absence is defensible: of the 150,000 soldiers who landed on Normandy beaches on June 6, 1944, fewer than two thousand were African American, and they came ashore as support troops (driving trucks, unloading supplies, setting up barrage balloons) in later waves after the beachheads had been secured.¹⁵ But hundreds of thousands of African American troops were in Great Britain at the time, building roads and airports, transporting supplies, and cooking food for the troops. Many wanted to fight—and to participate in D-Day—but were not allowed to. Not only had the army and the navy (and its marines) rigidly segregated their ranks along racial lines; they had also, by and large, barred blacks from combat roles. The U.S. high command determined that black soldiers could not be trusted to execute missions, especially when the nation's welfare was at stake.¹⁶

The bands of exclusively white brothers whom Ambrose, Spielberg, and Hanks celebrate were not naturally occurring formations. They resulted from a deliberate U.S. policy to separate black from white—at a great financial cost to taxpayers, who paid for the duplication of facilities and services, and at the risk of turning army bases into racial battlegrounds between white and black soldiers. At training bases, in particular, black soldiers increasingly expressed their anger at being asked to fight a war for democracy and against Nazism while living in a nation that denied them the basic rights and decencies of citizenship.¹⁷

It would not have been easy to address this matter in a movie focused on the first week in Normandy after D-Day.¹⁸ A desegregated military would emerge late in the 1940s, partly because of protests by black soldiers and the growing revulsion of white Americans at the prevalence of Nazi-style racial practices in their own society. Over the next fifty years, the military became the most successfully integrated institution in America.¹⁹ Still, there is something troubling about Spielberg's decision—following Ambrose's example—to choose racially homogeneous outfits and moments to celebrate the nation without pausing to note that this homogeneity was the product of a government policy. By reproducing historical patterns of internal exclusion without critiquing them, Spielberg and Ambrose may have helped to reinvigorate them.

Even if *Saving Private Ryan*, *Band of Brothers*, and Ambrose's books traffic in nationalist nostalgia for an era before Vietnam, when the United States fought a good war, military units stayed intact, and white men ruled Amer-

ica, such works still have something to offer those who would construct a liberal nationalism: the character of the citizen soldier. The historical recovery of this figure in the 1990s ironically occurred at a time when the U.S. military had all but abandoned him as an ideal around which to organize and legitimate itself. When instituted near the end of the Vietnam War, the shift toward a professional army had aroused little controversy. Republicans saw it as a way to escape the hammer of antiwar protest; they calculated, correctly, that domestic protests against foreign wars would decline when young American males no longer faced the prospect of conscription. Antiwar protesters viewed the end of the draft as a victory for their campaign to make it impossible for the United States to sustain its involvement in Southeast Asia. Military leaders worried that the new volunteer system would yield too few quality recruits, but they were reluctant to share their reservations with the public. Meanwhile, millions of young men, and their parents and siblings, were simply relieved to learn that Vietnam no longer threatened their future.²⁰

What few understood at the time is how the shift to the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) would professionalize military ranks, make military service a specialized career rather than a widely shared civic duty, and narrow the social base from which soldiers were drawn. Popular connection to and control over the military declined, in part because most Americans no longer had a personal tie to it, and in part because the military, like most professions, developed a culture specific to its work and largely inaccessible to outsiders. That culture, inevitably, admires the professional soldier more than the amateur, the individual who demonstrates “real commitment” to his work rather than the “dabbler” who, as in the case of Captain John Miller, is eager to go home.²¹

To criticize the AVF is not to impugn the individual qualities of current and former military men and women. One can point to former generals, such as Colin Powell, Wesley Clark, and Anthony Zinni, who served well in both military and political roles. During the Second Iraq War, some officers expressed their reservations about the war’s purpose and execution, the overextension of the army and the marines that it entailed, and the failure to prepare adequately for a long and bloody occupation.²² The rank-and-file military contains many patriotic and well-trained men and women of various races and ethnicities who sincerely desire to serve their country and to make a proud vocation of their military life. The issue is not the quality of individual warriors and generals but the long-term social and political consequences of nurturing a professional military.

Certainly, earlier generations of Americans would have looked suspiciously on the kind of armed forces that twenty-first-century America has produced. Nothing rankled eighteenth-century revolutionaries more than the presence of Britain’s “standing army” in their midst. This was an army thought to serve only the ambitions of the crown, inclining the king and Parliament toward imperial adventurism, corrupting their governing instincts, and strangling the liberties of the British people.

In designing their new nation, the founders of the American republic resolved not to create such a military force. The standing army of the United States would remain small. Its generals would serve in political capacities if called upon, but they would also know—following the example of Cincinnatus and George Washington—when to retreat into their private lives. One of the earliest and most enduring heroes of the Revolutionary War was the minuteman—the citizen soldier from Lexington and Concord who had mobilized to defend his new nation and then returned to his farm once his service was no longer needed.²³

The decision to rely on citizen soldiers and state militias had its own dangers, of course. George Washington never liked them and was especially critical of the New England units for their reluctance to submit to his and the military’s discipline.²⁴ Both during and after the Revolution, militiamen did not always wait for the government to call them into action and decided, instead, to take matters into their own hands—pursuing outlaws, thieves, and intruders and dispensing their own justice. Some of the individuals identified by nineteenth-century militias as “intruders” may have been genuine threats to public safety; others were marked as dangerous because of the color of their skin, their religion, their alleged lack of civilization, their itinerancy, or their poverty. Indians, Mexicans, and African Americans understood all too well that the line between honorable militias and vigilantes was often hard to fix. The night riders of the Ku Klux Klan adopted their own version of the militiaman image.²⁵ Meanwhile, the right to bear arms both strengthened the citizen-soldier tradition and denied governments a monopoly over the means of violence.

As the militia tradition declined in the early twentieth century, the meaning of citizen soldiery changed as well. It now referred less to militiamen—civilians who viewed military service as a recurring part of their civic duty and who kept their own weapons and cultivated an ethic of volunteering when asked to fight—and more to young, able-bodied male citizens whom the government called upon (or conscripted) to serve in its military.²⁶

While acknowledging the dark side of the militia-citizen-soldier tradition, one can still say that it served the Republic well in one sense: it ensured that major wars would require assent from a broad cross section of the population. Even if political leaders did not seek a formal vote for war, they still had to generate a consensus that a particular war was worth the risk of losing husbands, brothers, and sons in battle. Of course, administrations bent on war have deployed all the tools of propaganda and persuasion they could muster, even if that meant misleading the public. But public skepticism was generally stronger and more probing when citizens had to weigh the value of war against the risk of losing a family member than it is today when the great majority of Americans face no such choice. With the exception of World War II, there had been a large opposition to every war in which the United States became involved, beginning with the Revolutionary War and concluding with Vietnam.²⁷ In February 2003 hundreds of thousands of Americans took to the streets to protest the impending war with Iraq. But once the war began, the numbers quickly dwindled.

The Bush administration's doctrine of preventive war—and the decision to invade Iraq—would probably have faced stiffer opposition had it been confronted by a military dependent for its man- and womanpower on citizen soldiers. Such soldiers and their families can provide a democratic check on the ambitions of rulers. It is hardly an accident that the most public and effective questioning of the war after hostilities began came from the ranks of National Guardsmen (and their families), men and women who carry on the citizen-soldier tradition in their own way: they are “weekend warriors” who must be available for military service in times of urgent need. General Creighton Abrams, army chief of staff when the AVF was introduced in 1973, restructured his service to ensure that units in future engagements would always include a mix of active and reserve units, the latter to be composed of National Guardsmen; it was his attempt to keep the army from becoming entirely detached from civilian America.²⁸ That decision explains why National Guard units played a prominent role in both the First and Second Iraq Wars.

Prior to the second war, the war-fighting component of National Guard service was not particularly prominent in the minds of its members. Most who joined the Guard in the 1980s and 1990s regarded it more as a second job than as a civic duty or military obligation: it provided a dependable supplemental income in return for a relatively low expenditure of time and energy. Guardsmen did not expect to be called to active duty, or, if they were, they anticipated their deployments would be brief and not too dan-

gerous. Thus most Guardsmen were not prepared to question the Pentagon's decision to send large numbers of them to Iraq in 2003 and 2004.

But as their deployments in a theater of war dragged into months, and sometimes into years, many began to ask searching questions of themselves and of the military: As citizens first and soldiers second, how many months or years of service did they owe their country? Was this war winnable? Was it worth the sacrifice of their lives? Gradually, members of the Guard recovered the voices they had lost or never known: those of citizen soldiers. They became more willing to make their views heard precisely because they were citizens first and soldiers second.²⁹

Given the public's enchantment with World War II and its citizen-soldier heroes, it is curious that a critique of the Bush administration's embrace of the professional military and its preemptive strike on Iraq did not develop sooner.³⁰ Why did the popular media's embrace of the citizen soldier have so little effect on public debate and political consciousness?

Three reasons suggest themselves. First, of course, is the destruction of the World Trade Center Towers and the loss of 3,000 lives—the most devastating single attack on U.S. civilians in American history.³¹ In the aftermath of that national trauma, it was difficult to question how the country's military is organized and how its dependence on professional soldiers might undercut the vigor of its republican institutions. Indeed, popular thinking ran in just the opposite direction. The Bush administration used the wave of defensive patriotism to build support for a professional, efficient, and “shock and awe” military needed to protect America.

A second reason why the celebration of the citizen soldier had so little impact is that the books and movies about World War II produced in the 1980s and 1990s focused too narrowly on the individual at war. Stephen Ambrose was the main architect of this focus, having pioneered the writing of military history from the perspective of ordinary soldiers rather than that of generals.³² Yet his social history is frustratingly constricted. Despite his love of the citizen soldier, Ambrose tells his readers almost nothing about his men as civilians—where they lived; the various families, neighborhoods, social circles, activities, and jobs in which they were enmeshed; or the political beliefs they brought with them when they entered the military. He only shows us his soldiers at war and in battle, and he is most interested in their reactions to stress and death. Filmmakers such as Spielberg, who followed Ambrose's lead, give viewers little more information about the civilian pasts of the soldiers, or they do so in a stylized and stereotypical sense that renders the fabric of past life almost meaningless.³³

This preoccupation with citizen soldiers as embattled men at war lends itself more easily to discussions of manhood and warriorship than to ruminations that might address the relationship between military service and citizenship. Thus conservatives intent on reinstilling martial virtue into a society they perceive as having gone soft, and on restoring male power after a generation of feminist advance, have been able to turn Ambrose's and Spielberg's work to their own advantage.

A third reason why celebration of the citizen soldier did not translate into criticism of the AVF during a "war of choice" in Iraq has to do with Vietnam.³⁴ In one important respect, the Vietnam War belongs to the same historical moment as does World War II: the United States fought both wars with a citizen-soldier army built from mass conscription. During World War II, citizen soldiers contributed through their willingness to serve, fight, and sacrifice. Many made similar contributions in the Vietnam War, but other patriotic Americans offered a different civic contribution—by resisting the war. Some refused, on principle, to become soldiers in the first place; others, once drafted, refused to fight; still others fought but came home angry, disturbed, and determined to expose and denounce what the government had compelled them to do on the field of battle.³⁵

To raise the issue of antiwar protest—especially in regard to a war that the United States lost—is to enter a complicated moral and philosophical terrain about what constitutes civic duty and what does not. What forms of resistance to war can truly be considered expressions of civic duty? Certainly filing for conscientious objector status and being willing to go to jail rather than serve in the military must be seen as civic acts. But what about fleeing to Canada rather than submitting to the draft? What about procuring a draft deferment on questionable grounds—by elaborately documenting phantom injuries or infirmities? What about desertion—or, most troubling of all, desertion in the midst of battle? Where do we draw the line between self-interest—saving one's own skin—and civic duty—doing what's right for the country?

This issue came into sharp relief during the Second Iraq War when, in October 2004, a group of nineteen reservists refused to risk their lives to deliver a shipment of fuel, arguing both that the fuel was contaminated (and therefore unusable) and that American commanders had failed to provide their truck convoy with the necessary protection. Was this a cowardly act of self-preservation or a courageous stand against a military bureaucracy and Department of Defense that had shown callous indifference to the lives of the men under its command?³⁶

Or consider the Vietnam protesters in the streets of America in the 1960s. They had certainly risen above their self-interest, but many had also concluded that America was rotten and not deserving of their loyalty. Can you discharge a civic duty when you no longer want any part of the republic of which you are a citizen? This is a complicated question, but one thing seems clear: a healthy republic requires a mechanism for citizens to voice their displeasure about a war that is deemed to be unjust or not in the nation's interest. Sometimes the highest duty of a citizen soldier is to refuse to fight or, if he or she has already been to battle, to come home to speak out about that experience and to do everything one can to end the war. If the government cannot make a compelling case for war, then the war should become harder to prosecute.

John Kerry was once a citizen soldier (or, to be precise, citizen sailor). Never interested in becoming a professional warrior, he nevertheless volunteered with several buddies from Yale to serve in Vietnam. Kerry's service was valorous. He was a bit too grubby for medals, but not overly so in a war in which corruption pervaded the medal awarding system. He probably did take advantage of his class privilege to end his Swift Boat service after four months, instead of serving for the prescribed year. But in those four months he risked his life on a regular basis. On one occasion he saved the life of a fellow navy man while taking enemy fire. His Swift Boat mates clearly regarded him as an exceptional leader and a brave man.

After returning from Vietnam, Kerry joined the Vietnam Veterans against the War. It took courage for Kerry to go before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as he did in 1971, to tell the nation's leaders that the war was wrong, that it could not be won, and that it was corrupting the souls of the young men sent to fight it. His congressional speech and testimony are riveting and may constitute the most important civic deed of his long career.³⁷

Yet, in Kerry's 2004 presidential campaign, he mostly refrained from discussing this second act of his time as a citizen soldier. When he accepted the Democratic nomination, he referred only to the first act: "I'm John Kerry, and I'm reporting for duty." He alluded to the great things that the 1960s generation had done, but he could not bring himself to defend his own antiwar activity.³⁸ During the campaign, he even distanced himself from the documentary film *Going Upriver: The Long War of John Kerry* (2004), made by his longtime friend George Butler, which celebrated his role in the antiwar movement.

Kerry thus engaged in an act similar to those of Ambrose and Spielberg:

he refused to confront the lingering divisions over the Vietnam War. To face them would have meant defending the claim he made in 1971, that U.S. involvement in that war was morally wrong. It would have meant articulating the obligation of citizens to protest, especially in times when governments have committed the nation to foolish and damaging wars. It might have helped Kerry define a strong case against U.S. involvement in the Second Iraq War, notwithstanding the political risk.

Kerry's reluctance to speak about his civic act of protest reveals how much the memory of Vietnam continues to influence the ideology of American nationalism. It also suggests that liberals who wish to reclaim the national faith can only do so by confronting the difficult lessons of that war.

Ironically, Ambrose, Spielberg, and the others have shown how this might be done—by making such powerful depictions of the citizen soldier. If the figure of the citizen soldier only becomes an excuse to glorify warriorship, it will be of little use to liberal nationalists. It will simply serve those who regard war as the essence of both manhood and nationhood. But if the celebration helps begin a discussion about the proper relationship between military service and civic duty, then it might become a way for liberals to recover their nationalist voice.

Such a discussion will not likely yield the nationalism-without-enemies that some liberals desire. But it holds out the possibility of creating a decent and popular nationalism with these principles at its core: that republics and their citizens should be slow to go to war and should make such decisions democratically; that citizens ought to deliberate about the possibility of war in the knowledge that family members not currently in the military may be called upon to fight; that dissent from war can be a patriotic act and must be defended as such; and that the best soldiers, in the broadest sense of the term, are not professionals who make the military a vocation but civilians who regard such service as a civic duty. Twenty-first century liberals would be well served by finding an analogue for the citizen soldier—in both his World War II and his Vietnam incarnations.

NOTES

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2004. Finally, a special thanks to Michael Kazin and Joseph McCartin for their encouragement and expert editorial advice.

1. On the centrality of war to liberal nationalism before 1970 (and the turn away from war after 1970), see Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001). On the Iran hostage crisis and Carter's emphasis on limits, see David Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).
2. Gerstle, *American Crucible*, epilogue.
3. On liberal opposition to war, see Charles DeBenedetti, *Origins of the Modern American Peace Movement, 1915–1929* (Millwood, N.Y.: KTO Press, 1978); Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New Moral Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889–1963: The Intellectual as Social Type* (New York: Knopf, 1965); Carl Resek, ed., *War and the Intellectuals: Essays by Randolph S. Bourne, 1915–1919* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964). On Rustin's pacifism during World War II, see John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: Free Press, 2003).
4. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: Norton, 1992); David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996); Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, eds., *Civic Engagement in American Democracy* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1999).
5. James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Stephen E. Ambrose, *D-Day, June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).
6. *The Civil War*, directed by Ken Burns, PBS Home Video, 1990, DVD; *Saving Private Ryan*, directed by Steven Spielberg, Dreamworks SKG, 1998, DVD; *Band of Brothers*, directed by David Frankel, Tom Hanks, David Leland, Richard Loncraine, David Nutter, Philip Alden Robinson, Mikael Salomon, Tony To, HBO Home Video, 2001, DVD; *Gettysburg*, directed by Ronald F. Maxwell, Warner Home Video, 1993, DVD; Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998); Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation Speaks: Letters and Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1999); Tom Brokaw, *An Album of Memories: Personal Histories from the Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 2001).

7. On Patton, see Ladislav Farago, *Patton: Ordeal and Triumph* (New York: I. Obolensky, 1964); for a cinematic rendition, see *Patton*, directed by Franklin J. Schaffner, DVD, Twentieth Century Fox, 1970.
8. The key figure in *Band of Brothers*, Lieutenant (and later Captain) Richard D. Winters, fits this profile as well, though he has not been an educator in civilian life.
9. For insight into the lone cowboy or gunman as a figure in American culture, see Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992); Arthur M. Eckstein and Peter Lehman, eds., *The Searchers: Essays and Reflections on John Ford's Classic Western* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004).
10. On "humping the boonies," "fraggings," and other aspects of the war in Vietnam, see Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1993). On the collapse of military discipline, see also Robert D. Heinl Jr., "The Collapse of the Armed Forces," *Armed Forces Journal*, June 7, 1971.
11. Steven Spielberg, "Of Guts and Glory," *Newsweek*, June 29, 1998, 68.
12. A partial list of these prominent Vietnam movies includes *Coming Home*, directed by Hal Ashby, United Artists, 1978, DVD; *The Deer Hunter*, directed by Michael Cimino, EMI/Universal, 1978, DVD; *Apocalypse Now*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, United Artists, 1979, DVD; *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, directed by George Pan Cosmatos, Lions Gates, 1985, DVD; *Platoon*, directed by Oliver Stone, Hemdale, 1986, DVD; *Full Metal Jacket*, directed by Stanley Kubrick, Nantant, 1987, DVD; *Born on the Fourth of July*, directed by Oliver Stone, Fourth of July, 1989, DVD.
13. See, for example, A. Susan Owen, "Memory, War, and American Identity: Saving Private Ryan as Cinematic Jeremiad," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19 (September 2002): 249–82.
14. Spielberg, "Of Guts and Glory."
15. Ambrose, *D-Day*, 372.
16. Gerstle, *American Crucible*, chap. 5.
17. Ibid.; Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State during World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); David J. A. Hunter, "Jim Crow Abroad: American G.I.s and the Problem of Race in World War II Britain," unpublished seminar paper, 2003, University of Maryland, in author's possession.
18. It would have been easier to introduce the race question in a movie on the Battle of the Bulge, when Eisenhower, desperate for manpower, permitted black truck drivers to volunteer for combat; five thousand did so. Ambrose, *D-Day*, 372. The

makers of *Band of Brothers*, which has a long episode on the Battle of the Bulge, chose not to take up this opportunity—except to briefly show on screen a black truck driver.

19. On the history of integration in the military, see Morris J. MacGregor Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces, 1940–1965* (Washington: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1981); Bernard Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: Free Press, 1986); Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler, *All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Colin Powell, with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995).
20. David R. Segal, *Military Organization and Personnel Accession: What Changed with the AVF—and What Didn't* (College Park: Center for Philosophy and Public Policy, University of Maryland, 1981); Martin Binkin, *America's Volunteer Military: Progress and Prospects* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1984); U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *Status of the All-Volunteer Armed Force*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., June 20, 1978 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1978); Edward W. Brooke and Sam Nunn, *An All-Volunteer Force for the United States?* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977).
21. Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, eds., *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001); Thomas W. Lippmann, "Socially and Politically, Nation Feels the Absence of a Draft," *Washington Post*, September 8, 1998; David R. Segal, *Recruiting for Uncle Sam: Citizenship and Military Manpower Policy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989); Jerald G. Bachman, John D. Blair, and David R. Segal, *The All-Volunteer Force: A Study of Ideology in the Military* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977); Robert K. Fullinwider, ed., *Conscripts and Volunteers: Military Requirements, Social Justice, and the All-Volunteer Force* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983); Eliot A. Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers: The Dilemmas of Military Service* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985); Binkin, *America's Volunteer Military*. Andrew Bacevich has stressed how the All-Volunteer Force has given American elites (economic and educational) an excuse to opt out of military service. In 2000 only 6.5 percent of military enlistees between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four had had any college education. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 28.
22. On the criticism by military officers (mostly retired) of the Bush administration, see "Group Urges Voters Not to Choose Bush," *New York Times*, June 14, 2004; Peter Slevin, "Retired Envoys, Commanders Assail Bush Team," *Washington Post*, June 17, 2004; "Retired Officials Say Bush Must Go," *Los Angeles Times*, June 13,

- 2004; Peter Slevin, "Group Seeks Change in Security Policy; Dignitaries Fault Bush Administration," *Washington Post*, June 13, 2004.
23. John Whiteclay Chambers II, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: Free Press, 1987), chap. 1. On the minuteman tradition, see Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976).
24. Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 27–28, 76–77. Ellis endorses Washington's dim view of the militias. For a positive view of these militias, see David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 19–21.
25. For insight into the history of vigilantism, see Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). On threats that armed groups of white men posed to blacks, see Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).
26. On the decline of the militia tradition, see Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, chaps. 2–3. See also Elliot A. Cohen, "Twilight of the Citizen Soldier," *Parameters* 31 (Summer 2001): 23–28.
27. It is estimated that a third of the colonials living in the thirteen colonies opposed the Revolutionary War. In the case of World War II, opposition to war only collapsed once the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. In the late 1930s antipathy toward getting involved in armed conflict and a reluctance to be drawn into Europe's second world war were popular sentiments in American society. For a perceptive portrait of the strength of antiwar sentiment in 1930s America, see Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *A Life in the Twentieth Century: Innocent Beginnings, 1917–1950* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).
28. Bacevich, *New American Militarism*, 39–41.
29. See, for example, the May 1, 2004, radio address given by Paul Rieckhoff, a National Guard officer from New York City, who served ten months in Iraq with the 124th Infantry, Third Battalion. This address was given as the Democratic Party's response to Bush's radio address announcing that America had accomplished its mission in Iraq. First Lieutenant Paul Rieckhoff, "Rebuttal to G. W. Bush, Mission Accomplished," May 1, 2004 <<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,118735,00.html>>. See also Anthony Ramirez, "National Guard Officer Offers Criticism of Bush's Iraq Plan," *New York Times*, May 2, 2004; "Under Armored," a *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* transcript, December 9, 2004, in which Rieckhoff discusses National Guardsmen concerns with moderator Ray Suarez

- and Lt. Gen. Michael De Long (<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military/july-deco4/armor_12-9.html>); and "Troops' Queries Leave Rumsfeld on the Defensive," *New York Times*, December 9, 2004. For more on the Guard, see Jeffery Gettleman, "Anger Rises for Troops' Families as Deployments in Iraq Drag On," *New York Times*, July 4, 2003; Monica Davey, "Deadly Week Ends in Tears for the Fallen," *New York Times*, April 15, 2004; Eric Santora, "Families and Individuals Join in Anger and Frustration," *New York Times*, August 30, 2004; Thomas E. Ricks, "Strains Felt by Guard Unit on Eve of War Duty," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2004 (this includes a story on a Labor Day AWOL incident and low morale); Monica Davey, "For 1,000 Troops, There Is No Going Home," *New York Times*, September 9, 2004; Monica Davey, "Eight Soldiers Plan to Sue over Army Tours of Duty," *New York Times*, December 6, 2004; Matthew B. Stannard, "Citizen Soldiers on a Global Mission: National Guard General Says State's Force Stretched to Do All That's Asked of It," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 12, 2004; John F. Burns, "With 25 Citizen Warriors in an Improvised War," *New York Times*, December 12, 2004.
30. Here and there we can detect traces of this line of thinking, but only traces: for example, in the proposal floated by Congressman Charles Rangel and other members of the Black Caucus in 2003 and 2004 to bring back the draft so that all American families would have to face the prospect of sending loved ones into harm's way; and in the work of a North Carolina security studies think tank that had been exploring the dangers generated by the growing gap in America between military and civilian society. Charles B. Rangel, "Bring Back the Draft" (op-ed piece), *New York Times*, December 31, 2002; Darryl Fears, "2 Key Members of Black Caucus Support Military Draft," *Washington Post*, January 3, 2003; Triangle Institute for Security Studies: Project on the Gap between the Military and Civilian Society, <<http://www/poli.duke.edu/civmil/>>. For other relatively early examples of this critique, see Michael Moore's argument with Bill O'Reilly, Fox News, "The O'Reilly Factor," July 27, 2004, <<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,127236,00.html>>.
31. I do not include the attack on the Pentagon here because the Pentagon is not properly considered a civilian target, even though many civilians work there.
32. Ambrose's glorification of the grunt rather than the brass (probably his oeuvre's most enduring contribution) sprang from the same populist sensibility that prompted liberal and left-leaning historians of the 1970s and 1980s to embrace "social history"—the history of ordinary men and women rather than that of presidents, diplomats, captains of industry, and brilliant artists and intellectuals. Perhaps nothing so clearly reveals Ambrose's affinity for left-liberal sensibilities

(other than his thirty-year friendship with World War II bomber pilot and Vietnam dove George McGovern) as does his zeal for writing a history of the World War II military from the "bottom up."

Ambrose was always interested in military history. He wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on Henry Wager Halleck, Lincoln's chief of staff, and then, in the early 1960s, became editor of the Eisenhower papers, a project that made his reputation as a historian. But his career as a military historian did not follow a conventional path. He had done his graduate work at the University of Wisconsin, where, by his own account, he had been influenced by the progressive-left spirit that animated intellectual life in Madison in the 1950s. As a student, he would later recall, he joined the Socialist Party, though he did not elaborate on how long he was a member or describe the kind of activism (if any) in which he became engaged.

This early exposure to radicalism intensified as the 1960s progressed: Ambrose grew his hair long, heckled President Nixon at Kansas State University in 1970 (an act that cost him an endowed professorship there), and supported McGovern in 1972. Among his heroes, in addition to McGovern, was Ernest Gruening (D-Alaska), one of the two U.S. senators to vote against the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964. Ambrose later wrote that in the 1960s he "was anti-war to such a degree" that he might "well have slipped into the pit that many doves fell into—blaming the United States for everything that went wrong here and abroad." In his book *Rise to Globalism*, he criticized Harry Truman for deciding to drop the bomb on Hiroshima more to scare the Soviet Union than to compel a Japanese surrender.

Ambrose's interest in social history fits with his liberal-left orientation in the 1960s. His movement to the right began, by his own account, in the 1970s during his work on the life and career of Richard Nixon, a man whom Ambrose had despised but, through the course of writing three volumes on him, came grudgingly to admire. See Stephen E. Ambrose, *To America: Personal Reflections of an Historian* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), from which it is possible to reconstruct his political trajectory from the 1950s through the 1980s; the quote in the preceding paragraph comes from p. 135 of that book. See also "Interview with Stephen E. Ambrose, Ph.D.," Academy of Achievement: A Museum of Living History, May 22, 1998, <www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/amboint-1> (accessed June 30, 2005). The other works by Ambrose referenced above are Halleck: *Lincoln's Chief of Staff* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962); Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971); and *Nixon*, 3 vols. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987–91).

33. Thus Spielberg alludes to the ethnic origins of the soldiers in Miller's platoon by naming one Richard Reiben (Irish), a second Adrian Caparzo (Italian), a third Michael Horvath (eastern European Christian), and a fourth Stanley Mellish (Jewish). And in demonstrating how all these soldiers made common cause, Spielberg gestures toward the World War II theme of the platoon as a multi-ethnic crucible of Americanization and solidarity. (For more on this theme, see Gerstle, *American Crucible*, chap. 5.) But the cultures (and neighborhoods) out of which these soldiers emerged seem indistinguishable from each other. Spielberg does not pause to examine them, to give them color or texture, or to make them a factor in the life and death of platoon members. The only scene from the United States that Spielberg puts on screen (other than a scene involving George Marshall in U.S. military headquarters) concerns the visit of an army officer and chaplain to the Ryan home to report to Mother Ryan on the deaths of three of her sons. The Ryan farm (huge golden wheat fields) and the Ryan house (a meticulous, perfectly kept Victorian farmhouse) are pure cliché.

The only character, besides Ryan, whose cultural background seems to make a difference to events in the movie is Mellish. Mellish dies at the hands of a German because a fellow U.S. soldier, Timothy Upham (a Gentile), is frozen by cowardice. Spielberg may have meant this episode to be a metaphor for the cowardice of the Gentile world in failing to confront Nazism and the Holocaust. In general, however, Spielberg, like Ambrose, is most interested in the qualities that World War II soldiers displayed while under the stress of battle—toughness, courage, plain-spokenness, stoicism, and sometimes skepticism, cowardice, and brutality.

34. Some scholars stress a fourth reason why interest in the citizen military has declined, and that has to do with its alleged obsolescence in an age of high technology and limited wars. Armies of citizen soldiers, Eliot Cohen has argued, are best suited to mass wars in which technological requirements are low (and thus the need to train poorly educated recruits is minimal). But Cohen is too quick, perhaps, to advance arguments grounded in technological determinism and too reluctant to examine the political motivations that impelled the Nixon administration, in the 1970s, to free itself from a citizen soldiery and embrace a professional military. See Cohen, "Twilight of the Citizen Soldier," 25–26; for a contrary view, see Bacevich, *New American Militarism*, 217–20.

35. On the history of the antiwar movement, see Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up? American Protest against the War in Vietnam, 1963–1975* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984); Charles DeBenedetti, with Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990); Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine:*

Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

36. Neela Banerjee and Ariel Hart, "Inquiry Opens after Reservists Balk in Baghdad," *New York Times*, October 16, 2004; "When Soldiers Say No," *New York Times*, October 19, 2004, editorial page. The punishment meted out by the military to these refuseniks was surprisingly mild.
37. On Kerry's wartime and antiwar experiences, see Michael Kranish, Brian C. Mooney, and Nina J. Easton, *John F. Kerry: The Complete Biography by the Boston Globe Reporters Who Know Him Best* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004); Douglas Brinkley, *Tour of Duty: John Kerry and the Vietnam War* (New York: William Morrow, 2004); and *Going Upriver: The Long War of John Kerry*, directed by George Butler, Swiftboat Films and White Mountain Films (2004). For the charges leveled against Kerry by John O'Neill and other Vietnam Veterans, see John E. O'Neill and Jerome R. Corsi, *Unfit for Command: Swift Boat Veterans Speak Out against John Kerry* (Washington, : Regnery, 2004). Excerpts of Kerry's 1971 Senate Foreign Relations Committee testimony can be found in William A. Williams, ed., *America and Vietnam: A Documentary History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1985); visual excerpts are available in *Going Upriver*.
38. John Kerry, Nomination Acceptance Speech to the Democratic National Convention, July 29, 2004, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A25678-2004Jul29.html>>.

ALAN WOLFE

★ ★ ★ ★

★ Religious Diversity

★ *The American Experiment That Works*

Mention the word "diversity," as people do all the time these days in the United States, and one thinks immediately of questions concerning race. When the subject is broadened beyond race, moreover, it often extends to other categories of human existence—including ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation—that are to some degree like race, in the sense that the categories themselves signify characteristics that lead some people to discriminate against people who possess those characteristics. To say that America has not responded well to the challenge presented by diversity is to say that it has failed in its mission to treat everyone with equal respect and dignity.

There is a good reason why discussions of diversity in America are generally cast in the language of failure. When we consider how much racial discrimination has persisted in American life, even those who are optimists about how far we have come since the days of Jim Crow—I consider myself one such optimist—can hardly speak in triumphant terms, for so much remains to be done before America is free of the taint of racism. Few are the number of Americans so convinced that the American record on race is unblemished that they would go around the world touting the United States as a model for all countries to follow.

One subject that is frequently left out of discussions of diversity in America, however, is the question of religion. On the face of it, religious diversity ought to be even more difficult to achieve than racial diversity. In post-Westphalian European history, there is little evidence of commitments to religious diversity. If the king was Catholic (or, for that matter, Protestant), so were the people; and societies that were divided by religion were constantly at war. Nor is religious diversity a goal throughout much of the contemporary world. Pakistan, a Muslim state, seceded from India shortly after India won its independence from Great Britain and thereby created a society that is more than 95 percent Muslim. And the only other state created since World War II along specifically religious lines is Israel. Before its creation, Jews were always a religious minority wherever they