American Political Thought

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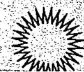
Pursuing the American Dream

OPPORTUNITY AND EXCLUSION OVER FOUR CENTURIES



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TO MY PARENTS

It helps to see character modeled.

1

The American Dream and Its Role in American History

> The new world . . . once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent. . . . face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.
>
> —F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

No phrase captures the distinctive character and promise of American life better than the phrase "the American Dream." As former President Bill Clinton said in his 1997 State of the Union address, "America is far more than a place. It is an idea." There are other beautiful lands, other free societies, and other wealthy nations, but America is "exceptional" because it is the home of an idea—and that idea is the American Dream. But ideas have to be realized, they have to be embodied in the lives of real people, before they have weight and substance.

Has the American Dream been embodied in the lives of real Americans? Has the American Dream even been open to all Americans? If not, how should we think about equality and opportunity, about gender, race, ethnicity, and achievement as these ideas relate to the American Dream? How these questions are answered will determine how Americans think about themselves and their history, whether with undiluted pride, with deep shame and remorse, or with some complicated and evolving mix of pride, shame, and hope.

The answer, as we shall see, is hope. Hope is justified, indeed required, because a society born in hierarchy and exclusion has become dramatically

more free and inclusive. How did this happen? What were the forces of exclusion that barred some Americans from full access to the American Dream, and what were the social, economic, and political processes that promoted, often only partially, equality and opportunity for the formerly excluded? To answer these questions, we must first explore two related ideas: the American Creed and the American Dream.

The American Creed

Louis Hartz, one of the leading American historians of the mid-twentieth century, described colonial America as a "fragment society."[1] Hartz meant that the Englishmen and women who immigrated to America in the seventeenth century did not represent the full range of English, let alone European, political, social, and religious opinion. The fragment of English society that fled the tensions and conflicts of the Old World to seek a better life in the New World was composed mostly of middling men, small landowners, artisans, and tradesmen. In the political battles of the 1620s, these men placed their hopes with the reformers in Parliament and the Church of England. When King Charles and Archbishop Laud began to resist reform with force in the 1630s, John Winthrop, John Cotton, and more than twenty thousand of their followers removed to North America.

The liberal fragment of English thought that wave after wave of settlers carried to the New World drew heavily but selectively on the Old World. First, the seventeenth-century Protestantism that the Puritans and Quakers shared, even when leavened by the Anglicans in Virginia, Catholics in Maryland, and a thin smattering of Jews and others throughout, stressed covenanted communities, Christian millennialism, and a consuming sense of God's immediate presence in the world. Second, the early eighteenth-century focus on Enlightenment ideals highlighted the individualism latent in Protestantism while bringing increased attention to natural rights, popular sovereignty, and limited government. And finally, throughout the colonial period, most Americans maintained a deep reverence for English political and legal traditions. For example, the English Common Law tradition lay behind American reverence for ideas, phrases, and themes like a government of laws, not men; law and order; the rule of law.

Colonial Americans drew on this cultural and intellectual heritage to create

communities that then developed and evolved in interaction with the continent itself. By the late eighteenth century, America's self-image, its political creed, was set. Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and their revolutionary colleagues in the Congress of 1776 grounded the new nation's independence on the declaration that "all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." Although Jefferson was immensely proud of his primary authorship of the Declaration of Independence, the ideas to which he gave voice belonged to a generation. In fact, nearly fifty years after the Declaration was written, Jefferson told Henry Lee that the Declaration was intended "to be an expression of the American mind, and to give that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion."[2] The luminous phrases of the Declaration of Independence put liberty, equality, and opportunity at the core of the American Creed. Jefferson's words have been a standing challenge to each new generation of Americans to do well, to do right, and always to do better.

Nor is the importance of the Declaration to the American Creed simply American mythology. A long line of foreign observers has pointed to the Declaration as the definitive summary of American values. The British sage G. K. Chesterton, in his 1922 classic *What I Saw in America,* declared that "America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence."[3] Another prominent foreign observer, the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal, also beautifully captured the central ideas of the American Creed. Writing during World War II, Myrdal argued that the American Creed was grounded on "the essential dignity of the individual human being, of the fundamental equality of all men, and of certain inalienable rights to freedom, justice, and a fair opportunity. . . . For practical purposes the main norms of the American Creed . . . are centered in the belief in equality and in the rights to liberty."[4]

Moreover, contemporary analysts still point to the same familiar ideas and concepts as fundamental to the American Creed. Two prominent American scholars provided nearly identical descriptions of the fundamental principles on which our polity, economy, and society rest. Samuel Huntington concluded his study of the American Creed by declaring that "the same core values appear in virtually all analyses: liberty, equality, individualism, democracy, and the rule of law under a constitution." Seymour Martin Lipset concluded that "the American Creed can be described in five terms: liberty, egalitarianism,

individualism, populism, and laissez-faire."[6] Both Huntington and Lipset highlight liberty, equality, and individualism. These are the Jeffersonian core of the American Creed. Lipset's reference to populism is probably preferable to Huntington's to democracy, at least for the founding and early national periods. American politics was populist; that is based on popular sovereignty and active citizenship, before it was recognizably democratic. Finally, Lipset's laissez-faire (by which he means a dedication to capitalism, markets, and competition) and Huntington's rule of law under a constitution draw attention to our base commitments to free markets and limited government. Hence, a general description of the fundamental values of the American Creed would include liberty, equality, individualism, populism, laissez-faire, and the rule of law under a constitution.

Yet even as we define the American Creed, we know that the pride that we feel is not fully justified. Consider three of the authors and books referred to in the immediately preceding paragraphs. Myrdal's famous book, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy,* is a landmark study of the continuing presence of racism in a society that boasts of its commitment to liberty, equality, and opportunity. Moreover, Huntington's study of the American Creed is entitled *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony,* while Lipset's study is entitled *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword.* All three titles exude ambivalence about the state of our national life. The source of this ambivalence is not hard to find. America has never fully lived up to its Creed.

The best recent analysis of the conflicting strains of thought and action in American public life is Rogers M. Smith's *Civic Ideals* (1997). Smith described the American civic culture as comprising "multiple traditions," including the liberal individualist tradition that Hartz highlighted, as well as a republican communitarian tradition, and an exclusivist (nativist, racist) tradition. In Smith's description of American history, the hierarchical influences of republicanism and the exclusivist strains of nativism and racism are woven throughout American culture, thought, and action; they are always present, and they often triumph. Scholars and analysts also are keenly aware that the ideas that form the American Creed are both complex and at least potentially incompatible. Isaiah Berlin's famous "Two Concepts of Liberty," in which he distinguished between negative liberty, described as freedom from, and positive liberty, described as freedom to, still sparks heated debate. Equality has been variously argued to mean equality in the eyes of God, before the law, of opportunity, and of outcomes. Moreover, liberty can conflict with equality, constitutionalism can constrain democracy, and laissez-faire competition can conflict with the rule of law. Each new generation of American citizens and leaders has struggled to find a healthy balance in law and policy between and among the disparate elements of the American Creed.

The American Dream

So how have we found the right balance between the component ideas, even the conflicting shards, of the American Creed? We have been guided by the American Dream. The American Dream has always been, and continues to be, the gyroscope of American life. It is the Rosetta stone or interpretive key that has helped throughout American history to solve the puzzles of how to balance liberty against equality, individualism against the rule of law, and populism against constitutionalism. The American Dream demands that we constantly balance and rebalance our creedal values to create and preserve an open, competitive, entrepreneurial society in which the opportunity to succeed is widely available. Despite the many conflicting strands of the American Creed, the American Dream insists that this must, and must increasingly, be a country in which opportunity is available to all and honest hard work yields the chance to succeed and thrive.

At the dawning of the eighteenth century, decades before American independence, Virginia planter Robert Beverly (1673–1722), building on William Penn's description of America as "a good poor man's country," described America as "the best poor man's Country in the World." Benjamin Franklin made a similar point in assuring immigrants that though many arrive in America as poor "servants or Journeymen, . . . if they are sober, industrious, and frugal, they soon become Masters, establish themselves in Business, marry, raise families, and become respectable Citizens."[7] Penn, Beverly, and Franklin were at the head of a long line of commentators that have seen America as holding out a distinctive promise of opportunity to citizens and immigrants alike. Throughout the nineteenth century, Franklin and his literary creations, Poor Richard and Father Abraham, were the most widely cited exemplars of opportunity and success in the society. One nineteenth-century orator lauded Franklin as "a man who rose from nothing, who owed nothing to parentage or patronage, who enjoyed no advantages of early education, which are not open,—a hundredfold open,—to yourselves, who performed the most

menial services in the business in which his early life was employed, but who lived to stand before Kings, and died to leave a name which the world will never forget."[8] By the end of the century, Emma Lazarus's famous lines, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. . . . Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tost, to me," adorned the new Statue of Liberty. To Lazarus, as to so many before her, America was a vast continent of enormous potential with open land and opportunity for all that would come.

Although the idea of a distinctive American Dream has been central to our national history, the precise phrase did not come into common use until the twentieth century. Still, both J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, the author of *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), and Henry Adams, the grandson and great grandson of presidents, in his magisterial *History of the United States During the Administration of Thomas Jefferson* (1889), described the powerful American ethos of freedom and opportunity as a "dream."[9] The young Walter Lippmann used the phrase "the American dream" in *Drift and Mastery* (1914) to condemn as unconscionable drift the Jeffersonian localism that had so dominated the nineteenth century. Lippmann called for a new dream worthy of the new century.[10] James Truslow Adams's classic *Epic of America* (1931) popularized "the American dream, that dream of a land in which life should be fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement."[11] While the exact phrase "the American Dream" may have been coined by Lippmann and popularized by Adams, the idea, the insight, and the feeling have been present from first settlement.

Moreover, contemporary analysts describe the American Dream in terms almost identical to those used by Franklin, Lazarus, and Adams. Jennifer L. Hochschild's prominent book, *Facing Up to the American Dream* (1995), said, "the American Dream . . . promises that everyone, regardless of ascription or background, may reasonably seek success through action and traits under their own control."[12] John Schwarz wrote that the promise of the American Dream is that "everyone who steadfastly practices certain practical virtues will find a place at the table. . . . These virtues—self-control, discipline, effort, perseverance, and responsibility—stand at the core of our . . . idea of good character. . . . The notion that people do have a capacity to control their own destinies is an enormously strong, almost insistent feature of our American culture."[13]

Not surprisingly, then, modern cultural and political icons, from Bruce Springsteen to Bill Clinton, have appropriated the idea of the American Dream. Rocker/balladeer Bruce Springsteen reminded his listeners: "I don't think the American dream was that everybody was going to make . . . a billion dollars, but it was that everybody was going to have an opportunity . . . to live a life with some decency and some dignity and a chance for some self-respect." In a 1993 speech to the Democratic Leadership Council, Bill Clinton reminded his listeners: "The American Dream that we were all raised on is a simple but powerful one—if you work hard and play by the rules you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given ability will take you."[14]

The American Dream is the spark that animates American life. It is the promise that the country holds out to the rising generation and to immigrants that hard work and fair play will, almost certainly, lead to success. All who are willing to strive, to learn, to work hard, to save and invest, will have every chance to succeed and to enjoy the fruits of their success in safety, security, and good order. Education (physical and intellectual skills), good character (honesty, cleanliness, sobriety, religiosity), hard work (frugality, saving, investing), and a little luck form a broad pathway to the American Dream. Some start life with more wealth, more prominence, and more influence, but the opportunity to rise in society is promised to everyone. And it's not just rise—if the breaks go right, everyone has a shot at the top. If Abraham Lincoln and Bill Clinton can become president and Andrew Carnegie and Bill Gates can become the world's richest man, then others can reasonably seek to rise as well.

This promise of opportunity and sense of possibility has quickened the national pulse from the beginning and has tied each generation to those that came before and, just as importantly, to those that will come after. CBS News anchor Dan Rather made this point in a recent book, entitled *The American Dream: Stories from the Heart of Our Nation* (2001). Rather reported that all of the people he interviewed have a "sense of the dream's presence, and importance, and feel that America has made their own dreams possible. This commonality, this interconnectedness between our own dreams and a national ethos of aspiration may be the dream's most important contribution to the America of today and tomorrow."[15]

So that's the dream—a shimmering vision of a fruitful country open to all who come, learn, work, save, invest, and play by the rules. The reality, as we all know, has had darker dimensions. The continent's original inhabitants were slowly but inexorably dispossessed by a rising tide of alien settlement. Of the new arrivals, not all came in any meaningful sense; some were brought, held, and used. Others were barred. Only America's most fortunate sons, and few, if any, of her daughters, were allowed, at least initially, to compete for her

accolades and prizes. What influences and forces limited the application of the dream to some Americans while barring others? What claims were made, what arguments offered, what principles advocated to explain and justify the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others from the promise of American life—the right to pursue the American Dream?

Patterns of Exclusion

The American Dream has always been more open to some than to others: it has been more open to wealthy white men than to women and people of color. In fact, Howard University's Jane Flax argued that "the normative American citizen has always been a white man and, though others have won rights, he remains so."[16] Moreover, when immigrants, minorities, and women achieved new rights, these usually amounted to the right to compete against well-entrenched white men in a matrix of established law and policy that they had developed to protect their current interests and future prospects.

At every stage of American history, ours has been a more or less hierarchical society. Only some—initially white, male, Protestant, property holders—were entitled to full and unfettered participation. Their advantages were written into colonial charters and later into state constitutions. American Indians were removed, slaves were imported, women were legally subordinated, and the federal constitution acknowledged and entrenched these patterns of privilege and exclusion. Harvard political scientist Jennifer Hochschild reminds us that throughout American history, "the emotional potency of the American Dream has made the people who were able to identify with it the norm for everyone else. . . . Those who do not fit the model disappear from the collective self-portrait."[17]

Others might have a place in society, but it was a limited and subordinate place. Race, gender, wealth, ethnicity, and religion have all been used to exclude persons and groups from the community of American citizens.[18] The reasons offered to justify these exclusions have included the will of God, innate psychological differences, lack of social and economic independence, lack of physical and intellectual ability, and familial and societal requirements. That many were excluded is well known, but the arguments used, how and why they worked, and how ultimately they were overcome, is neither well known nor well understood.

The treatment of blacks has been the most glaring deviation from the American Creed. Although a few blacks entered early Virginia as indentured servants and some apparently gained their freedom after serving out their indenture, blacks were first brought to Virginia and sold as slaves in the mid-1620s. The Virginia House of Burgesses formalized chattel slavery in 1661, Maryland followed in 1663, and over the remainder of the century, the "peculiar institution" spread throughout the South. During the eighteenth century, slave codes were strengthened to grant masters overwhelming power over slaves; education was prohibited, manumission was made more difficult, and the rights of the small class of free blacks were restricted. The Constitution recognized slavery, without ever mentioning the word, in its provisions on continued importation, representation, and taxation, and in subsequent legal guarantees concerning the return of fugitive slaves. Although the slave trade formally ended in 1808, slavery continued to expand right up to the outbreak of the Civil War. Moreover, throughout the nineteenth century, even after the end of slavery, most blacks continued to live in the agricultural South, and most were tied to the land almost as effectively by the sharecropping and crop-lien systems as they had been by slavery. Early in the twentieth century, black social scientist and social activist W. E. B. Dubois declared that the movement to erase the "color line" from American society would be the defining struggle of the new century. As America entered the final decade of the twentieth century, the legal scholar Derrick Bell declared that "racism is permanent."[19] Although Americans can hope that Bell is wrong, we must admit that racism has, so far, been a prominent part of American life, law, and policy.

Women's struggle for equality in America, while less overt and less obviously intense than the struggle of blacks, has, in its own way, been just as difficult. Blacks were held in slavery by force, and their white masters often declared them to be and treated them as if they were less than human. Women, on the other hand, were held in subjection at least partially by religious and cultural assumptions in which they shared. The Christian teaching that wives were to love, honor, and obey their husbands was powerfully reinforced by the common-law principle of "coverture." Coverture held that women were subsumed, or covered, by the legal personality of their father until marriage and their husband after marriage. With limited exceptions prior to 1850, a woman's property went to her husband at marriage, as did any wages or income she might earn after marriage. She could not sue in court in her own name, serve on juries, vote, or otherwise assume a posture of equality in the public sphere. Divorce was rare, but when it did occur, property and children

remained with the husband. Although women could not be bought and sold, only in unusual circumstances did they possess or control significant property of their own. Not until the middle of the twentieth century did growing movements for racial and gender equality gain traction in America.

Despite the presence of inequality and discrimination, the dream made America a magnet for immigrants. Throughout the colonial and early national periods, most Americans saw immigrants as important to settlement, defense, and economic development. But when too many immigrants arrived too quickly, concern grew that the fundamental nature of the country might be submerged in a sea of unacculturated newcomers. Whether they came for religious freedom or economic opportunity, they came in waves that alternatively thrilled and frightened those already here. The first major nativist reaction against immigrants began in the mid-1790s with federalist concerns over Irish and French radicals. That crisis passed with Thomas Jefferson's election in 1800, and immigration remained manageable through the 1830s. However, when Irish Catholic immigration picked up substantially in the 1840s, nativist reaction produced the Know Nothing movement. Several northern and midwestern states elected Know Nothing, or American Party, governors and state legislatures, though their power generally waned before they could pass the anti-Catholic agenda upon which they had campaigned. Nativism generally subsided from the Civil War into the 1880s. Again, an upsurge in immigration and a change in the sources of immigration heightened nativist concern. Between 1880 and 1920, about 25 million immigrants came to the United States. Among the new immigrants were 4 million Italians, mostly Catholic, and 4 million Eastern European Jews, mostly from Russia, Germany, and the Austro-Hungarian empire. These new immigrants aroused widespread suspicion and a wave of discrimination ensued that lasted through World War II. For more than half a century beginning in the early 1880s, most Asians were simply excluded from immigration and from eligibility for citizenship. Moreover, Jews "were at first kept at the margins of 'white' America simply because they were not Christians."[20] Over the course of the twentieth century, economic integration and intermarriage blurred the lines between old immigrants and new immigrants, but the color line between whites and blacks remained stark.

Finally, the relationship between American Indians and later settlers remains a deeply tragic story. From the first appearance of Europeans in the Americas at the end of the sixteenth century to the last Indian wars of the late nineteenth century, native American peoples declined due to war and disease

from perhaps 10 million to a mere quarter of a million. For nearly three centuries, colonial and later state and federal government policy was to remove Indians from the advancing line of white settlement. By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, Indians had been subdued and restricted to reservations. Throughout the twentieth century, with brief interludes in the Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson administrations, national policy was to wean Indians from federal protection and support and to immerse them in mainstream society and economy. Some even envisioned the dismantling of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the reservation system and, ultimately, the disappearance of Indians qua Indians within the American society. As the twenty-first century dawned, Indian reservations still existed, and despite the glitz of the occasional casino, they were among the bleakest and most impoverished places in America.

Processes Leading to Inclusion

Exclusion has been a persistent and destructive fact of American social life, but it has not been a permanent and unchanging fact. Over time, the right to dream the American Dream has been opened, at least formally, to new and increasingly diverse groups. Critically, the intellectual case for inclusion was always present. The core ideas of the American Creed—liberty, equality, opportunity—were always available to be claimed by the excluded. Not every claim was honored or even acknowledged immediately; resistance was continuous and often tenacious, but the claimants had Mr. Jefferson's words and America's best sense of itself on their side. Their opponents frequently knew it or ultimately came to see it. In addition, broad-scale social processes, including democratization, westward expansion, the rise of markets, urbanization, industrialization, education, and the transition from physical to mental labor, have steadily carried yesterday's others closer to the center of American life. Great differences in status, wealth, and opportunity still remain, but over time, new groups of contestants entered the great game, learned its rules, and began to take home at least some of the prizes.

Vernon Parrington, a prominent historian of the early twentieth century, explained the power of the American Creed as an inclusionary vehicle. He wrote, "The humanitarian idealism of the Declaration has always echoed as a battle cry in the hearts of those who dream of an America dedicated to demo-

cratic ends. It cannot be long ignored or repudiated, for . . . It is constantly breaking out in fresh revolt."[21] Later generations of Americans added to the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, the Gettysburg Address, the Pledge of Allegiance, and the "I have a dream" speech of Martin Luther King. These sacred texts evoke the central tenets of the American Dream in each new generation. Hence, Dan Rather, an American icon in his own right, concluded his recent investigation of the contemporary American Dream with the observation that it is still the best foundation "on which to build the American future. As an idea, it is inherently inclusive, and it has the power to strike a chord in all of us. It defines us as a people, even as we add to its meaning with each new chapter in our national experience."[22]

Yet we all know that the implementation of these luminous ideas—that all men, all people, should enjoy legal, political, and social equality—is incomplete even now. So how are we to understand the place and role of the American Dream in American history? Should we exult with Louis Hartz that "since the first sailing of the *Mayflower,*" American history has been "a story of new beginnings, daring enterprises, and explicitly stated goals."[23] Or should we sigh with Samuel Huntington, that "the history of American politics is the repetition of new beginnings and flawed outcomes, promise and disillusion, reform and reaction"?[24] Neither, fortunately. Reality is more complex and interesting. The view of American history that sees an endless and nearly futile cycle of reform and reaction misses the incremental advance of the formerly excluded toward a fuller share of American life. Poor white men, women, and minorities achieved rights incrementally and over time as they doggedly pressed for the opportunity to fairly measure themselves against the Dream. Poor white men won legal and political equality during the Jacksonian era but have continued to struggle for economic opportunity, labor rights, workplace safety, and social equality. Women claimed legal equality, property rights, employment opportunities, and educational access throughout the nineteenth century. Political rights were achieved in 1920, and attention turned to economic and social equality later in the twentieth century. The movement to abolish slavery in the middle of the nineteenth century was followed by battles throughout the twentieth century to secure educational, economic, political, and social equality. Paul Berman makes the critically important point that all of these movements were long-term "campaigns to lead one sector of society after another upward from the gloom of bottom-place standing in the social hierarchy into the glorious mediocrity of the American middle."[25]

The long and winding spiral staircase that leads to "the glorious mediocrity

of the American middle" is well worn because, as Pauline Maier has observed, "the ultimate authority of the Declaration," and of the American Creed and Dream more generally, "rests, as it always has, . . . in the hearts and minds of the people, and its meaning changes as new groups and new causes claim its mantle, constantly, reopening the issue of what the nation's 'founding principles' demand."[26] But in a free society, governed more by norms and values than by law and force, one must often wait for what seems a painfully, even embarrassingly, long time for the hearts and minds of the people to change. Moreover, hearts and minds do not change mysteriously; there is no shower of moral clarity that leaves them pure and new. Usually, society must evolve and change in ways that draw old ideas, or at least their existing institutional embodiments, into question. Nobel Prize–winning economist Robert William Fogel has described this process, arguing, "there has been a recurring lag between the vast technological transformations and the human adjustments to these transformations. It is this lag that has provoked the crises that periodically usher in profound reconsiderations of ethical values, that produce new agendas for . . . social reform, and that give rise to political movements that champion the new agendas."[27] Socioeconomic change can so reconstitute American society that its political structures no longer seem to promote the fundamental principles of equity and justice that Americans believe is their birthright.

Key dynamics creating change within the American society have been westward settlement, economic growth and development, the consequent evolution of work, and the increasing importance of education. The easy availability of land, the presence of a whole continent to conquer and tame, created a powerful and enduring sense that America was the land of opportunity. The images of the woodsman, the mountain man, the wagon master, the trail boss, the '49er, and the riders lined up for the Oklahoma land rush, suggest the importance of the westward migration in search of opportunity, success, and wealth. The frontier required that people be judged on results, not status, which produced a strong commitment to equality of opportunity, competition, and achievement. J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, Alexis de Tocqueville, Frederick Jackson Turner, and many others have been eloquent on this point.

In 1800 nearly 95 percent of adult white men were farmers, and as late as 1820 only six American cities had populations over 25,000. But the rapid urbanization, industrialization, and economic growth of the nineteenth century created tremendous opportunity and expansion. By 1900 New York was the second largest city in the world, and Chicago, which had not even existed in 1800,

was the fifth largest city in the world, with a population of 1.7 million. By the end of the nineteenth century, only 45 percent of the workforce was still in agriculture, leaving 55 percent for the new industrial and service occupations of the burgeoning cities. As the economy evolved, so, obviously, did the nature of work and the skills and qualifications that workers needed to be successful.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, as the American economy modernized, families evolved from units of production to units of consumption. The evolution of economic activity from family production into increasingly large, bureaucratic, and corporate entities changed the role and place of women in society. Once husbands abandoned self-employment for wage labor—in other words, once they gave up the farm or the downstairs craftsman's shop—the only way that a wife could add to the family resources was to work for wages herself. Moreover, the evolving economy increasingly created jobs that both men and women, appropriately trained, could perform. In fact, by 1930 more Americans were working in white- and pink-collar service jobs than in either agriculture or manufacturing. Services employed more than 50 percent of workers for the first time in the 1960s, and by the end of the 1980s, more than 70 percent of workers were in services.[28]

Robert Max Jackson described the forces that produced new roles and opportunities for women in *Destined For Equality: The Inevitable Rise of Women's Status.* His conclusion was that "the structure and integral logic of development within modern political and economic institutions . . . eroded gender inequality." Modern jobs more often require and reward strong minds than strong backs. When you are hiring brains, being distracted by the gender packaging is inefficient and costly. "Ultimately," Jackson reasoned, "the logic of modern state organization has simply proved inconsistent with the needs for maintaining gender inequality."[29] Moreover, Jackson pointed to the U.S. educational system as "a defining institution of modern life" in which individualistic assumptions relating to promotion through successive grades, competitive exams, achievement, and the importance of intellectual capability are "wedged . . . between the private world of the family and the public world of the economy and the political order."[30] As the economy's preference turned from strong backs to strong minds, an increasingly egalitarian educational system was expected to assure that young minds, male and female, black and white, Christians, Jews, and more, would be ready when the market summoned them.

How, then, has American society and the opportunities that it provided to citizens, whether the "normative" white male or the once marginalized and excluded, evolved and changed over four centuries? This book tells that story

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