**SOME NOTES FROM**

Meacham, Jon (2018). *The soul of America: The battle for our better angels*. New York: Random House 402p

Jon Meacham is a Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer. The author of the New York Times bestsellers: *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power, American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House, Franklin and Winston,* and *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush,* he is a distinguished visiting professor at Vanderbilt University, a contributing writer for *The New York Times Book Review,*  and a fellow of the Society of American Historians.

(Jacket note) We have been here before. In this timely and revealing book, the Pulitzer Prize–winning, #1 New York Times bestselling author Jon Meacham helps us understand the present moment in American politics and life by looking back at critical times in our history when hope overcame division and fear. With clarity and purpose, Meacham explores contentious periods and how presidents and citizens came together to defeat the forces of anger, intolerance, and extremism.

Our current climate of partisan fury is not new, and in *The Soul of America* Meacham shows us how what Abraham Lincoln called "the better angels of our nature" have repeatedly won the day. Painting surprising portraits of Lincoln and other presidents, including Ulysses S. Grant, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, and Lyndon B. Johnson, and illuminating the courage of such influential citizen activists as Martin Luther King, Jr., early suffragettes Alice Paul and Carrie Chapman Catt, civil rights pioneers Rosa Parks and John Lewis, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and Army-McCarthy hearings lawyer Joseph N. Welch, Meacham brings vividly to life turning points in American history. He writes about the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the birth of the Lost Cause; the backlash against immigrants in the First World War and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s; the fight for women's rights; the demagoguery of Huey Long and Father Coughlin and the isolationist work of America First in the years before World War II; the anti-Communist witch-hunts led by Senator Joseph McCarthy; and Lyndon Johnson's crusade against Jim Crow. Each of these dramatic hours in our national life has been shaped by the contest to lead the country to look forward rather than back, to assert hope over fear—a struggle that continues even now.

While the American story has not always—or even often—been heroic, we have been sustained by a belief in progress even in the gloomiest of times. In this inspiring book, Meacham reassures us, "The good news is that we have come through such darkness before"—as, time and again, Lincoln's better angels have found a way to prevail.

INTRODUCTION: TO HOPE RATHER THAN TO FEAR

Back of the writhing, yelling, cruel-eyed demons who break, destroy, destroy, maim,

and lynch and burn at the stake, is a knot, large or small, of normal human beings,

and these human beings at heart are desperately afraid of something. Of what?

Of many things, but usually of losing their jobs, being declassed, degraded, or

actually disgraced; of losing their hopes, their savings, their plans for their children;

of the actual pangs of hunger, of dirt, of crime.

—W.E.B. Du Boss, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 1935

We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have

strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory,

stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone

all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched,

as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

—Abraham Lincoln, *First Inaugural Address*, 1861

(p.4) ...in the heat of a Virginia August in 2017, heirs to the Dixiecrats' platform of white supremacy - twenty-first century Klansmen and neo-Nazis among them - gathered in Charlottesville, not far from where StromThurmond had taken his stand (in 1948). The story is depressingly well known: A young counter-protestor, Heather Heyer, was killed. Two Virginia state troopers died in a helicopter crash as part of an operation to maintain order. And the president of the United States—himself an heir to the white populist tradition of Thurmond and of Alabama's George Wallace—said that there had been an "egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides," as if there were more than one side to a conflict between neoNazis who idolized Adolf Hitler and Americans who stood against Ku Klux Klansmen and white nationalists. The remarks were of a piece with the incumbent president's divisive language on immigration (among many other subjects, from political foes to women) and his nationalist rhetoric.

(6) "We are determined to take our country back," David Duke, a former grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, said in Charlottesville. "We are going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump. That's what we believed in, that's why we voted for Donald Trump. Because he said he's going to take our country back. And that's what we gotta do."

For many, the fact that we have arrived at a place in the life of the nation where a grand wizard of the KKK can claim, all too plausibly, that he is at one with the will of the president of the United States seems an unprecedented moment. History, however, shows us that we are frequently vulnerable to fear, bitterness, and strife. The good news is that we have come through such darkness before.

This book is a portrait of hours in which the politics of fear were prevalent—a reminder that periods of public dispiritedness are not new and a reassurance that they are survivable. In the best of moments, witness, protest, and resistance can intersect with the leadership of an American president to lift us to higher ground. In darker times, if a particular president fails to advance the national story—or, worse, moves us backward—then those who witness, protest, and resist must stand fast, in hope, working toward a better day. Progress in American life, as we will see, has been slow, painful, bloody, and tragic. Across too many generations, women, African Americans, immigrants, and others have been denied the full promise of Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. Yet the journey has gone on, and proceeds even now

(7) The message of Martin Luther King, Jr.—that we should be judged on the content of our character, not on the color of our skin—dwells in the American soul; so does the menace of the Ku Klux Klan. History hangs precariously in the balance between such extremes. Our fate is contingent upon which element—that of hope or that of fear—emerges triumphant.

(8) What is the American soul? The dominant feature of that soul—the air we breathe, or, to shift the metaphor, the controlling vision—is a belief in the proposition, as Jefferson put in the Declaration, that all men are created equal. It is therefore incumbent on us, from generation to generation, to create a sphere in which we can live, live freely, and pursue happiness to the best of our abilities. We cannot guarantee equal outcomes, but we must do all we can to ensure equal opportunity Hence a love of fair play, of generosity of spirit, of reaping the rewards of hard work, and of faith in the future.

...Too often, people view their own opportunity as dependent on domination over others, which helps explain why such people see the expansion of opportunity for all as a loss of opportunity for themselves. In such moments the forces of reaction thrive. In our finest hours, though, the soul of the country manifests itself in an inclination to open our arms rather than to clench our fists; to look out rather than to turn inward; to accept rather than to reject.

(12) Our greatest leaders have pointed toward the future—not at this group or that sect. Looking back on the Dixiecrat challenge, Harry Truman—the man who won the four-way 1948 presidential campaign, triumphing over the segregationist Thurmond, the Progressive candidate Henry A. Wallace, and the Republican Thomas E. Dewey—once said: "You can't divide the country up into sections and have one rule for one section and one rule for another, and you can't encourage people's prejudices. You have to appeal to people's best instincts, not their worst ones. You may win an election or so by doing the other, but it does a lot of harm to the country"

(13) I am writing now not because past American presidents have always risen to the occasion but because the incumbent American president so rarely does. A president sets a tone for the nation and helps tailor habits of heart and of mind. Presidential action and presidential grace are often crucial in ameliorating moments of virulence and violence—and presidential indifference and presidential obtuseness can exacerbate such hours. We are more likely to choose the right path when we are encouraged to do so from the very top.

(15) Fear, as the political theorist Corey Robin has brilliantly argued, has been with us always. Understood by Robin and many scholars both ancient and modern as an anticipation of danger to oneself or to a group to which one belongs—including economic, racial, ethnic, religious, or other identity groups—it is among the oldest of human forces. "Political fear . . . arises from conflicts within and between societies," Robin wrote in his 2004 book *Fear: The History of a Political Idea*, adding that political fear can be "sparked by friction in the civic world" and "may dictate public policy, bring new groups to power and keep others out, create laws and overturn them." In the most elemental of terms, masters of such politics are adept at the manufacturing or, if the fear already exists, the marshaling of it at the expense of those who one believes pose a threat to one's own security, happiness, prosperity, or sense of self.

(16) The opposite of fear is hope, defined as the expectation of good fortune not only for ourselves but for the group to which we belong. Fear feeds anxiety and produces anger; hope, particularly in a political sense, breeds optimism and feelings of well-being. Fear is about limits; hope is about growth. Fear casts its eyes warily, even shiftily, across the landscape; hope looks forward, toward the horizon. Fear points at others, assigning blame; hope points ahead, working for a common good. Fear pushes away; hope pulls others closer. Fear divides; hope unifies.

(17) The measure of our political and cultural health cannot be whether we all agree on all things at all times. We don't, and we won't. Disagreement and debate—including ferocious disagreement and exhausting debate—are hallmarks of American politics. As Jefferson noted, divisions of opinion have defined free societies since the days of Greece and Rome. The art of politics lies in the manufacturing of a workable consensus for a given time--not unanimity. This is an art.

(19) History, Truman knew, is not a fairy tale. It is more often tragic than comic, full of broken hearts and broken promises, disappointed hopes and dreams delayed. But progress is possible. Hope is sustaining. Fear can be overcome. What follows is the story of how we have endured moments of madness and of injustice, giving the better angels of which Lincoln spoke on the eve of the Civil War a chance to prevail—and how we can again.

CH. 1 - THE CONFIDENCE OF THE WHOLE PEOPLE: Visions of the Presidency, the Ideas of Progress and Prosperity, and "We, the People"

(26) It was generally assumed that General Washington, a man with Cincinnatus-like standing who had voluntarily surrendered military power at the close of the Revolutionary War, would be the first to hold the presidential post. ...All in all, given the expectation of a President Washington, the creation of the office was an act of faith in the future and an educated wager on human character. From the start Americans recognized the elasticity of the presidency—and hoped for the best.

Such hopes have not always been realized. Near the end of Donald Trump's first year in power, for instance, The New York Times reported that, before taking office, he had "told top aides to think of each presidential day as an episode in a television show in which he vanquishes rivals." This Hobbesian view of the presidency—that every single day is a war of all against all—is novel and out of sync with much of the presidential past.

(27) In a twenty-first-century hour when the presidency has more in common with reality television or professional wrestling, it's useful to recall how the most consequential of our past presidents have unified and inspired with conscious dignity and conscientious efficiency. *(Meacham quotes Truman, Kennedy, Johnson)* ...To hear such voices is to be reminded of what we have lost, but also what can one day be recaptured.

(32) At Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on Thursday, November 19, 1863, Lincoln invested the Civil War with overarching meaning. Gone was the temporizing of his first inaugural, with its reassurances that slavery could stand in the places where it had taken root. To the Lincoln of Gettysburg, the war was no ordinary contest. It was not about territory or spoils. It was not about the boundaries of a nation or the control of its commerce. It was, Lincoln was saying now, about democracy and equality "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," Lincoln said in words that would live ever after. "Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure." The task of the present generation, Lincoln said, was to ensure "that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Fifteen months later, in his second inaugural, Lincoln continued his theme of calling on our better angels from four years earlier. "With malice toward none," he said, "with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations." Stirring words, but the work of peace was just that: work, an unfinished effort to reunite America, to confront the legacy of slavery, to rebuild the South, and to press on through shadow and twilight.

(35) The trust that Abraham Lincoln had in himself and in the people was surprising and grand, but it was also enlightened and well founded. He knew the American people better than they knew themselves, and his truth was based upon this knowledge.

(37) Woodrow Wilson *(wrote in 1908 about)* the ideal role the president could play. "His position takes the imagination of the country," he said. "He is the representative of no constituency, but of the whole people. When he speaks in his true character, he speaks for no special interest. If he rightly interpret the national thought and boldly insist upon it, he is irresistible; and the country never feels the zest of action so much as when its President is of such insight and caliber."

Which makes the character of the president critical, and character manifests itself in temperament. ...Temperament is one of those terms that brings the late Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart's definition of pornography to mind: We know it when we see it. Or, in this case, sense it. ...Discerning human temperament is more a question of intuition and impression than of clinical or tactile perception, and it is a chancy undertaking.

(40) The way to stand the "long strain on the temper" is to embrace compromise, seek balance, and strive to serve the national interest, which will be, in the fullness of time, in the personal historical interest of the individual president himself. Seemingly banal points, true, but recent history shows us that what we've long accepted as obvious isn't always as self-evident to a controlling portion of the electorate as one might think, or hope.

The essential question for voters, then, is discerning the nature of the man or woman who will be standing alone at what Kennedy described as the "vital center of action." For, as the Greeks knew, character is destiny.

(47) The battle that Johnson chose in the bleak closing weeks of 1963 was among the most difficult in American history. It was the unfinished work of the Civil War. To understand how the forces of fear had kept equality at bay for a century, and how Lyndon Johnson, an American president thrust to authority by assassination, fulfilled long-unmet promises, we must begin the story not in Dallas nor in Washington but in a village in Virginia and the Appomattox Court House.

CH. 2 - THE LONG SHADOW OF APPOMATTOX: The Lost Cause, the Ku Klux Klan, and Reconstruction

(51) On the afternoon of April 9, 1865, Robert E. Lee in an impeccable gray dress uniform, surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at the village of Appomattox in Virginia.

(53) As things turned out, Appomattox was as much a beginning as an end. In the war's tragic wake we can see the possibilities of the American experiment and its all-too-persistent realities

...For many, a new order in which blacks were equal to whites was disorienting and had to be fought with ferocity. The battle was especially pitched for white Southerners, whose wartime crusade, they told themselves, had been righteous. In the creed of the Lost Cause, arguments over states' rights, not over slavery, had led to war.

(58) The Southern strategy to bring victory out of defeat was articulated, among others,...by journalist Edward Pollard. ...(59) Pollard wrote that he was “profoundly convinced that the true cause fought for in the late war has not been “lost” immeasurably or irrevocably, but is yet in a condition to be ‘regained’ by the South ...the question was no longer slavery, but white supremacy, which Pollard described as the “true cause of the war” and the “true hope of the South.”

(61) In the spring of 1866 in Pulaski, Tennessee, six former Confederates gathered ...and struck on the idea of founding a new organization, to be known as the Ku Klux Klan.

(62) *(After Lincoln’s assassination, Andrew Johnson)* The president from Tennessee sometimes said the right things, but in the end his view of Reconstruction favored a fast resolution of the outstanding issues with the conquered states - and the rights of black freedmen did not lend themselves to quick adjudication. "White men alone must manage the South," Johnson remarked in 1865. Two years later, in 1867, the president asserted that blacks were incapable of self-government.

(63) Before his first year in office was out, Johnson had done much to return the Southern states to an antebellum footing. He had vetoed the 1866 civil rights bill and the Freedmen's Bureau bill, infuriating Radical Republican. ...The presidency which under Lincoln had been a tool of transformation had become, under Johnson, a refuge from modernity.

Johnson was ultimately impeached but not removed from office—he escaped conviction in the Senate by one vote—by Radical Republicans who believed him to be hopelessly accommodating toward his native South.

(66) (Under President Grant the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870) with its constitutional extension of voting rights to African American men.

(67) Grant was given the authority to suspend habeas corpus and to deploy military force to fight the Klan. The target of the bill: those who "conspire together, or go in disguise upon the public highway, or upon the premises of another for the purpose . . . of depriving any person or any class of persons of the equal protection of the laws."

The armies of the Lost Cause rallied against Grant and Congress. ...The Grant-era maneuvers against the reign of terror in the South—which included prosecutions—had the desired effect, and the Klan dissipated as an active force. It was a moment of hope in the postbellum world, but it was a brief one.

...An economic depression, a series of racially reactionary Supreme Court decisions, and the withdrawal of federal forces from the Louisiana and South Carolina statehouses after the disputed 1876 presidential election—the price of Republican Rutherford B. Hayes's defeat of Democrat Samuel Tilden—essentially brought Reconstruction to a conclusion.

(68) By the 1890s and into the first years of the twentieth century, Jim Crow laws were prevalent in the South, and black voters were systematically disenfranchised. The North, meanwhile, had its own pattern of de jure and de facto segregation. In 1894, Mississippi voted to include the Confederate battle emblem on its state flag. Two years later, in Plessy v. Ferguson, the Supreme Court sanctioned the racist principle of "separate but equal."

(69) Whites reigned supreme. Within about three decades of Lee's surrender, angry and alienated Southern whites who had lost a war had successfully used terror and political inflexibility (a refusal to concede that the Civil War had altered the essential status of black people) to create a postbellum world of American apartheid. Many white Americans had feared a post-slavery society in which emancipation might lead to equality, and they had successfully ensured that no such thing should come to pass, North or South. Lynchings, church burnings, and the denial of access to equal education and to the ballot box were the order of the decades. A succession of largely unmemorable presidents served after Grant; none successfully marshaled the power of the office to fight the Northern acquiescence to the South's imposition of Jim Crow.

"We fought," a Confederate veteran from Georgia remarked in 1890, "for the supremacy of the white race in America" That was a war they won—and, in a central American irony, they did so not alone but with the aid and comfort of many of their former foes on the field of battle.

CH. 3 - WITH SOUL OF FLAME AND TEMPER OF STEEL: "The Melting Pot," TR and His "Bully Pulpit," and the Progressive Promise

(75) Theodore Roosevelt’s capacity on some occasions to stand for equality and for openness and in other contexts to argue that it was the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon peoples to rule the world was a particular example of a more universal American inconsistency. We believed in life and liberty for some; we simultaneously believed in imposing our will on the lives and liberties of others on the grounds that they were innately inferior. The tension between these visions of identity, of assimilation, and of power have long shaped American life, and rarely more so than in the Age of the first Roosevelt.

(78) In perhaps his most quoted speech, "Citizenship in a Republic," delivered at the Sorbonne in 1910, TR offered a brilliant vision of the virtues of action:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

What was the purpose of action for Roosevelt? Born to great privilege, he adopted the progressive passion for reform that grew out of revulsion at the capitalistic excesses of an industrializing America. Roosevelt targeted those whom he referred to as the "malefactors of great wealth.”

(82) Immigration, a dominant issue for TR's America, was an enduring source of political discontent. In 1798, John Adams, amid war fever about France, signed the Alien and Sedition Acts to protect, in his view, the national interest against internal dissent and outside agitation. Passed by a Federalist-controlled Congress, the legislation, among other things, increased the number of years applicants for citizenship had to wait and authorized the president to deport any foreigner he deemed dangerous to the country "The Alien bill proposed in the Senate is a monster that must forever disgrace its parents," James Madison wrote Thomas Jefferson in the spring of 1798. Madison was right: Adams's historical legacy has been tarnished by this un-republican grab for power. And in the short term, the acts had the unintended consequence of giving new force to Adams's opposition, led by Jefferson and Madison, who went on to defeat the Federalists in the 1800 election.

Anxiety about refugees and immigrants and the related desire of presidents to quell that unease were then—and have always been—an element in the American experience. The country often limited immigration in moments of fear, only to have those fears dissipate amid cooling emotions and a reinvigorated opposition.

(90) To honor Lincoln’s Birthday in 1905, shortly after he (TR) won a full presidential term on his own, Roosevelt gave a farsighted address to a Republican gathering in New York City:

We of today, in dealing with all our fellow-citizens, white or colored, north or Sough, should strive to show just the qualities that Lincoln showed. ...Our efforts should be to secure to each man, whatever his color, equality of opportunity, equality of treatment before the law ...To deny any man the fair treatment granted to others no better than he is to commit a wrong upon him ..The only safe principle upon which Americans can act is that of “all men up,” not that of “some men down.”

CH. 4 - A NEW AND GOOD THING IN THE WORLD: The Triumph of Women's Suffrage, the Red Scare, and a New Klan

*It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union.*

—Susan B. Anthony, arguing for the equality of women before the law, 1873

*I would build a wall of steel, a wall as high as Heaven, against the admission of a single one of those Southern Europeans who never thought the thoughts or spoke the language of a democracy in their lives.*

—Georgia governor Clifford Walker, to the Second Imperial Klonvokation of the Ku Klux Klan, Kansas City, Missouri, 1924

(99) The President of the United States typed the speech himself. It was, in a sense, the least Woodrow Wilson could do. Like many American men, he had hardly been an enthusiastic supporter of the decades-long struggle for a constitutional amendment on women's suffrage, but, in the middle of a world war, Wilson had changed his mind and was now, in the early autumn of 1918, ready to take the case to the Senate.

On Monday, September 30, 1918, Wilson went to Capitol Hill to deliver the speech he had composed on his typewriter. His mission: to urge lawmakers to approve the proposed Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution granting women the vote. ...The people of the world, he told the Senate, were "looking to the great, powerful, famous Democracy of the West to lead them to the new day for which they have so long waited; and they think ... that democracy means that women shall play their part in affairs alongside men and upon an equal footing with them.”

(The Nineteenth Amendment was ratified on August 18, 1920; Wilson wrote) “I deem it one of the greatest honors of my life that this great event ...should have occurred during the period of my administration.”

(107) There was no more vivid manifestation of those lengthening shadows in the first decades of the twentieth century than the new Ku Klux Klan. A trilogy of novels by Thomas W Dixon, Jr., a Lost Cause devotee, helped lead to the Klan's rebirth. ...The books were widely read, and Dixon, who became a popular figure, went on the lecture circuit to spread his message of white superiority. ...In 1914, joined forces with the filmmaker D. W. Griffith to make a movie, *The Birth of a Nation*, a celebration of white supremacy and a sustained attack on African Americans. ...The film, which ran 187 minutes, was immensely profitable.

(109) *The Birth of a Nation* provoked protests in several cities, including Boston and New York, and offered the nascent NAACP an opportunity to organize and make the case for fairness in the public square. The reaction to the film as racist propaganda was compelling enough that President Wilson distanced himself from the entire enterprise.

Yet the film and its broader influence could not be contained. After *The Birth of a Nation*, a small group of men met on Stone Mountain, near Atlanta, on November 25, 1915. Led by William J. Simmons, an Alabama-born, circuit-riding minister, the gathering burned a cross and founded a new Ku Klux Klan.

(110) Simmons's choice of venue for the re-founding of the Klan in 1915 was rich in significance, for the Atlanta United Daughters of the Confederacy were campaigning for the creation of a Confederate memorial at Stone Mountain.

What began on that November night at Stone Mountain spread across white America. Forty-eight states—which is to say, every state in the Union at the time—had a Klan presence by 1924. Indiana was a stronghold; so were Oregon, Colorado, and Kansas. A combination of factors created a climate conducive to the Klan's rebirth. There was the wide influence of *The Birth of a Nation*, unease about crime, worry about anarchists, fear of immigrants flooding in from a Europe desolated by war, and, beginning in 1917, anxiety about Communism and subversion in the New World after the Bolshevik Revolution.

(119) Reliable numbers are hard to come by, but the best scholarly estimates put Klan membership at two million or so in the mid-1920s. Others fix it between three and six million. ...The Klan of the 1920s gave its adherents a social and political program that spoke to both the practical fears of the moment and to a mythology of identity.

(123) In August 1925, on a day of occasional rain showers, thirty thousand Klansmen (some estimates say fifty thousand) converged on Washington for a huge march on the National Mall. "The parade was grander and gaudier, by far, than anything the wizards had prophesied," the journalist H. L. Mencken wrote. "It was longer, it was thicker, it was higher in tone. I stood in front of the Treasury for two hours watching the legions pass.”

(125) By 1928 or so, the Klan, like its Reconstruction predecessor in the early 1870s, was ebbing. And just in time: A Klan with substantial strength in the tumult of the 1930s might have increased the chances of America falling into the totalitarianism that consumed some European nations in the same years. ...Despite the Klan's political power, American institutions designed to check and balance popular passion struck blows against the Invisible Empire. The courts, the press, and two presidents (Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge) took stands, however limited, against the politics of fear.

(132) On October 6, 1925 President Coolidge addressed a convention of the American Legion and said, “Whether one traces his Americanism back three centuries to the *Mayflower*, or three years of the steerage, is not half so important as whether his Americanism of today is real and genuine.”

(133) Coolidge added:

If we are to have . . . that union of spirit which is the foundation of real national genius and national progress, we must all realize that there are true Americans who did not happen to be born in our section of the country, who do not attend our place of religious worship, who are not of our racial stock, or who are not proficient in our language. If we are to create on this continent a free Republic and an enlightened civilization that will be capable of reflecting the true greatness and glory of mankind, it will be necessary to regard these differences as accidental and unessential. We shall have to look beyond the outward manifestations of race and creed. Divine Providence has not bestowed upon any race a monopoly of patriotism and character.

CH. 5 - THE CRISIS OF THE OLD ORDER: The Great Depression, Huey Long, the New Deal,

and America First

(141) Sinclair Lewis's 1935 novel *It Can't Happen Here* told the story of the rise of an authoritarian state in an America riven by economic and cultural chaos. Lewis's book painted a disturbing portrait of a United States that abandoned liberal democracy and sought stability in fascism. "Why, there's no country in the world," a fictional editor remarks in the novel, "that can get more hysterical—yes, or more obsequious—than America." The editor's sad rhetorical query: "Where in all history has there ever been a people so ripe for a dictatorship as ours!"

Less well known than Lewis's work is a small novel by Nathanael West, *A Cool Million,* a Candide— Horatio Alger parody. Published a year before *It Can't Happen Here*, *A Cool Million* includes the tale of the rise of a fascist politician. In it, a former American president, Shagpoke Whipple, takes advantage of the Depression to demagogue his way back to power. Here is a segment from a Whipple rally: "This is our country and we must fight to keep it so. If America is ever again to be great, it can only be through the triumph of the revolutionary middle class.”

(142) West was writing fiction, but only just. Perhaps the most consequential figure of the day, aside from FDR himself, was Huey Long, the former Louisiana governor who went to the U.S. Senate in 1932. ...Long was strikingly effective on the campaign trail. ...Long was a master at generating headlines. “He delighted in starting a fight,” his biography T. Harry Williams wrote. ...He is unscrupulous beyond belief. ...undoubtedly the easiest way to unite and animate large numbers in political association for action is to exploit the dynamic forces of hated and fear.

(147) That hope, the man chosen to rescue the nation from the abyss, Franklin Roosevelt, was hardly seen in a heroic light in the shadows of 1932. ...Charming, cagey, and courageous, FDR would spend the next dozen or so years winning four White House terms and trying, with varying degrees of success, to prove his critics wrong. ...(He said) “To meet by reaction that danger of radicalism is to invite disaster. Reaction is no barrier to the radical.

(148) In August 1921, at his family's summer retreat... Franklin Roosevelt was stricken with infantile paralysis. He would never walk unaided again. He was thirty-nine years old.

(149) The *New York Times* wrote: "Men will thank God on their knees, a hundred years from now, that Franklin D. Roosevelt was in the White House, in a position to give leadership to the thought of the American people and direction to the activities of their government, in that dark hour when a powerful and ruthless barbarism threatened to overrun the civilization of the Western World."

How did he do it? How did the man scorned in the beginning die a hero, bringing innumerable ordinary citizens to tears in the streets and on the farms of the country he loved? How did he salvage what seemed unsalvageable, rising to lead a nation through depression and world war?

One answer—and there are more than a few; such is the complexity of history—lies in FDR’s sense of hope, a spirit of optimism forged in his own experience. For it is not too much to say that a man who had personally survived cataclysm and overcome paralysis was well equipped—perhaps uniquely so—to prevail over national cataclysm and political paralysis.

"This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper," Roosevelt told the country at his first inauguration. "So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days."

(151) At a White House meeting, Roosevelt parried a questioner with a lesson in practical politics. “If you ever sit here, you will learn that you cannot, just by shouting from the housetops, get what you want all the time."

(154) The telephone in the president's bedroom in the family quarters of the White House rang in the middle of the night as Thursday, August 31, 1939, became Friday, September I, 1939. Adolf Hitler's Wehrmacht, executing a war plan code-named Case White, had struck Poland. World War II had begun in earnest. William Bullitt, Roosevelt's ambassador to France, got the word and called the president, who took the call in bed.

(155) The nation was strongly isolationist, and fear was a common theme—fear of entanglement, fear of sacrificing American blood and treasure for the advantage of others, fear of putting foreign demands ahead of national needs. The Depression was global in nature; if only we could put America first, the isolationists argued, then all might still be well. This view was held widely and deeply. In 1936, a survey by George Gallup found that 95 percent of those polled believed America should stay out of any European war. ...Roosevelt waged a steady but not overwhelming campaign to make the world appear relevant to a country battered by Depression and wary of foreign entanglements.

(158) Roosevelt used his State of the Union address ...on January 6, 1941, to link his vision of life at home with his understanding of America’s interests abroad.

In the future days which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression - everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world.

He closed on a note of realistic hope. "That is no vision of a distant millennium," Roosevelt said. "It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation."

(162) Lynchings of blacks by whites had still occurred with depressing regularity into the thirties. ...there had been 3,500 such attacks since 1900 but only 67 indictments and 12 convictions. ...In 1933, FDR spoke out against such racially motivated violence. “We know that it is murder ....We do not excuse those in high places or in low who condone lynch law.”

(164) On the symbolic front, Mrs. Roosevelt resigned from the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1939 when the group refused to allow Marian Anderson, the African American singer, to perform at the DAR's Constitution Hall near the White House. ...Anderson was instead invited to sing at the Lincoln Memorial to a vast Easter Sunday afternoon audience on the Mall. She opened with "My Country 'Tis of Thee" and closed with "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen."

(165) Roosevelt's greatest concession to fear, the internment of Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor, was also arguably his greatest failure as president. Beginning in 1942, about 117,000 Americans of Japanese descent were rounded up and consigned to concentration camps for the duration of the war. The shameful episode had all the hallmarks of a fevered era of fear run amok. There was racial prejudice, anxiety about espionage, and a lost sense of justice.

(166) The military did allow the creation of an all-Japanese American unit, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which fought bravely and well. In December 1945, General Joseph W. Stilwell, the American commander in the Far East known as "Vinegar Joe," flew to the farmlands of Orange County, California. On the porch of a frame shack, Stilwell presented Mary Masuda with the Distinguished Service Cross. Masuda and her parents had been detained under Executive Order 9066; her brother Kazuo had served in the 442nd, performing nobly under fire in Europe, including a twelve-hour lone mortar barrage on German positions. He was killed in action.

One of the party had this to say: "Blood that has soaked into the sands of a beach is all of one color. America stands unique in the world: the only country not founded on race but on a way, an ideal. Not in spite of but because of our polyglot background, we have had all the strength in the world. That is the American way."

Eloquent words, and Ronald Reagan, then a thirty-four-year-old movie star and liberal activist, spoke them well. More than four decades later, Reagan, in his final year as president of the United States, quoted a newspaper clipping about the presentation at the Masudas' as he prepared to sign the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. The bill - numbered 442 in honor of the 442nd - authorized compensation for the detained families and, perhaps more important, apologized to the victims of Roosevelt’s internment policy. “For here,” Reagan said, “we admit a wrong; here we reaffirm our commitment as a nation to equal justice under the law.”

(172) (After FDR’s death in April 12, 1945) In his cottage at Warm Springs—where a porch had been designed to resemble the prow of a ship, giving the paralyzed president the illusion of movement, of freedom—Roosevelt left the draft of a speech he had been scheduled to deliver on Saturday, April 13, 1945, on the occasion of the birthday of Thomas Jefferson. "Today, science has brought all the different quarters of the globe so close together that it is impossible to isolate them one from another," Roosevelt was to have said. "Today we are faced with the preeminent fact that, if civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships—the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together and work together, in the same world, at peace. . .. The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith."

They were, in a way, his last words.

CH. 6 - HAVE YOU NO SENSE OF DECENCY? Making Everyone Middle Class," the GI Bill,

McCarthyism, and Modern Media

*He was impatient, overly aggressive, overly dramatic. He acted on impulse. He tended to sensationalize the evidence he had. . .. He would neglect to do important homework and*

*consequently would, on occasion, make challengeable statements.*

—New York lawyer Roy M. Cohn, on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy

(178) *(Commenting about conditions in the late 1940s)* The product of both government action and of market forces, the creation of the post-World War II middle class was one of the great achievements in history. ...The engines of prosperity propelled millions into the broad midde class - an economic, cultural, and political ethos in which these millions of people had stakes in the present and future of the nation.

(181) While it took WWII to put a true end to the Great Depression, the work of the New Deal had already added a new and permanent dimension to the American experiment in the mid-twentieth century: the expectation that government could play a more direct role in individual lives.

(183) Eisenhower's essential acceptance of the existing political order was wise governance, but, as ever, fear could not be totally conquered. In the same years Truman and Eisenhower were using the presidency to improve the infrastructure of prosperity, anxieties about foreign influence and subversion were growing. "There was an atmosphere throughout the land [in the early 1950s] of suspicion, intolerance, and fear that puzzled me," William L. Shirer, who had covered Nazi Germany, wrote on returning home. "I had seen these poisons grow into ugly witch hunting and worse in the totalitarian lands abroad, but I was not prepared to find them taking root in our own splendid democracy" Yet here they were.

In the closing weeks of 1954, during a long drive down the Hudson Valley to New York City, the conversation among the four passengers in the car—all friends—turned, as it usually did, to politics. One of their number: Robert Welch, a conservative candy manufacturer based in Massachusetts...

Welch recalled that he then explained how Eisenhower—lifetime soldier, conqueror of Hitler, former supreme commander of NATO, and now president of the United States—was an "agent" of a "Communist conspiracy" to undermine and take over America. With a rising worry about domestic subversion in recent years, Welch said, there had been some hope that the country was coming to understand the threat from Moscow "The American people," Welch later wrote, "had begun to wake up to the extent of Communist infiltration into our government and into every segment of our public life."

...Eisenhower—whom Welch asserted was guilty of "a very sinister and hated word": treason—was not a lonely subversive or a solitary dupe. There were, Welch believed, plenty of others. One was Franklin Roosevelt... Another was the former army chief of staff and Truman secretary of defense and of state George Marshall... To Welch, John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower's secretary of state, was yet another "Communist agent." There was no evidence for such fevered assertions.

(184) Four years after his ride along the Hudson ...Welch founded the John Birch Society. ...the society believed itself to be engaged in an end-times struggle between good and evil.

(185) It was language made familiar in postwar America in part by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, the hard-drinking provocateur from Wisconsin. "Today we are engaged in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity" McCarthy told the Ohio County Republican Women's Club in Wheeling, West Virginia, on February 9, 1950. "The modern champions of communism have selected this as the time. And, ladies and gentlemen, the chips are down—they are truly down."

Concern about subversion was hardly novel. The House of Representatives, for instance, had formed a Committee on Un-American Activities, under the chairmanship of Congressman Martin Dies, a Democrat from Texas, in 1938. In 1940 Congress passed the *Smith Act*, which made it a crime for anyone to "knowingly or willfully advocate, abet, advise, or teach the duty, necessity, desirability or propriety of overthrowing or destroying any government in the United States by force or violence."

McCarthy, though, was something new in modern political life: a freelance performer who grasped what many ordinary Americans feared and who had direct access to the media of the day. He exploited the privileges of power and prominence without regard to its responsibilities; to him politics was not about the substantive but the sensational. The country feared communism, and McCarthy knew it, and he fed those fears with years of headlines and hearings. A master of false charges, of conspiracy-tinged rhetoric, and of calculated disrespect for conventional figures (from Truman and Eisenhower to Marshall), McCarthy could distract the public, play the press, and change the subject—all while keeping himself at center stage... McCarthy was an opportunist, uncommitted to much beyond his own fame and influence.

(187) McCarthy was in; he said he was "buying the package." *(of communist threats)* Why? Roy Cohn offered two reasons. "The first was patriotic, ...He was worried about the threat to the country posed by the Communist conspiracy...” The second? McCarthy, Cohn said, "saw the dramatic political opportunities connected with a fight on Communism. McCarthy was gifted with a sense of political timing. Sometimes he misjudged, but on balance his sense of what made drama and headlines was uncommonly good. . . . He had found, he thought, a politically attractive issue he could sink his teeth into."

...Thoughtful people correctly gauged the McCarthy threat. "McCarthy's methods, to me, look like Hitler's," Eleanor Roosevelt remarked. In a private letter, President Truman agreed with a correspondent who posited that "there is no difference in kind between Hitlerism and McCarthyism, both being the same form of bacteriological warfare against the minds and souls of men." Winston Churchill, in office for a second term as prime minister, added a paragraph to Elizabeth II's Coronation Address in 1952, ...implicitly defending the Anglo-American tradition of fair play from McCarthyite incursions.

(190) On June 1, 1950, Senator Margaret Chase Smith, a Republican from Maine, issued what she called a "Declaration of Conscience" against McCarthy's methods. ...She rose a few moments later on the Senate floor. "I would like to speak briefly and simply about a serious national condition," Smith said. "It is a national feeling of fear and frustration that could result in national suicide and the end of everything that we Americans hold dear." She continued:

I speak as a Republican. I speak as a woman. I speak as a United States Senator. I speak as an American. . . .

I think that it is high time that we remembered that we have sworn to uphold and defend the Constitution. I think that it is high time that we remembered that the Constitution, as amended, speaks not only of the freedom of speech but also of trial by jury instead of trial by accusation. . . .

Those of us who shout the loudest about Americanism in making character assassinations are all too frequently those who, by our own words and acts, ignore some of the basic principles of Americanism:

The right to criticize;

The right to hold unpopular beliefs;

The right to protest;

The right of independent thought.

Too few heeded Smith's warning; she was about four years ahead of most of her colleagues. While she did convince six other senators to join her "Declaration" —a defiant McCarthy dismissed them as "Snow White and the Six Dwarfs."

(191) His followers loved his style; his foes feared it. "From a distance, McCarthy may have looked, by some odd reversal of optical principles, larger than life and of greater consequence than he ever really was," Richard H. Rovere of The New Yorker wrote at the close of the fifties. "But he was large and consequential enough in those years...”

...Part of the answer lies in the nature of democracy itself: Millions of Americans approved of McCarthy no matter what the elites might say or do. And McCarthy was not without support and connections in sophisticated quarters. He was friendly with the Kennedys, hiring Robert Kennedy as a staff lawyer for his committee in 1953 and taking two of the Kennedy sisters on dates. As an anti-Communist Roman Catholic, McCarthy was popular in Massachusetts...

(193) How he loved the story of himself as the brave warrior, a story that dominated the newspapers of the day. McCarthy needed the press, and the press came to need McCarthy. He was fantastic copy, a real-life serial. ...(194) McCarthy understood the media’s ways and means. ...The senator learned to make sensational charges at just the right moment. ..(195) Television offered him ever expanding reach. ...McCarthy’s headline hunting also benefitted from the culture of journalism at midcentury: that the job of a journalist was to report the content of a statement, not to assess its validity. ...(196) When he read coverage he disliked, McCarthy ...went on the offensive, singling out specific publications and particular journalists...

(197) Eisenhower had flinched in taking McCarthy on during the presidential campaign. The senator had accused George Marshall of treason the year before... In the text of a speech (Eisenhower) was to deliver in Milwaukee on October 3, 1952, Eisenhower was slated to defend Marshall in no uncertain terms. "I know that charges of disloyalty have, in the past, been leveled against General George C. Marshall," Eisenhower was to have said. "I have been privileged for thirty-five years to know General Marshall personally. I know him, as a man and as a soldier, to be dedicated with singular selflessness and the profoundest patriotism to the service of America. And this episode is a sobering lesson in the way freedom must not defend itself."

Ike never uttered the words. Talked out of it by political advisers who thought it unwise to antagonize McCarthy and his supporters.

(199) At ten-thirty on the evening of March 9, 1954, CBS broadcast an episode of Edward R. Murrow's *See It Now.*  Its subject: Senator McCarthy. Its means of storytelling: images and recordings of McCarthy's own words. At the conclusion of the report, Murrow spoke more in sorrow than in anger. "We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty" he said. "We must remember always that accusation is not proof and that conviction depends upon evidence and due process of law. We will not walk in fear, one of another. We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine, and remember that we are not descended from fearful men—not from men who feared to write, to speak, to associate and to defend causes that were, for the moment, unpopular."

Then came Murrow's final words. "The actions of the junior Senator from Wisconsin have caused alarm and dismay amongst our allies abroad, and given considerable comfort to our enemies," Murrow said. "And whose fault is that? Not really his. He didn't create this situation of fear; he merely exploited it—and rather successfully. Cassius was right. 'The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves.' Good night, and good luck."

(200) A few weeks later, on the evening of April 5, 1954, President Eisenhower *(gave a speech about fear)* Eisenhower described the disposition necessary to survive life in an age of strain and uncertainty "We are worried about Communist penetration of our own country" he said, "and we are worried about the possibility of depression and the loss of jobs among us here at home." He continued:

Now, the greater any of these apprehensions, the greater is the need that we look at them clearly, face to face, without fear, like honest, straightforward Americans, so we do not develop the jitters or any other kind of panic, that we do not fall prey to hysterical thinking.

Sometimes you feel, almost, that we can be excused for getting a little bit hysterical, because these dangers come from so many angles, and they are of such different kinds, and no matter what we do they still seem to exist. . . .

It is the American belief in decency and justice and progress, and the value of individual liberty, because of the rights conferred upon each of us by our Creator, that will carry us through. . . . There must be something in the heart as well as in the head.

The end for McCarthy came in the months following the Murrow broadcast and the Eisenhower speech on fear, when hearings into McCarthy and the U.S. Army opened in the Senate. ... Day by day and week by week, McCarthy performed poorly before large television audiences, coming across as more gadfly than crusader.

(201) In an iconic moment, the counsel for the army, Joseph N. Welch, attacked the senator, who had clumsily attempted to impugn the loyalty of a young lawyer on Welch's team. "Until this moment, Senator, I think I never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness," Welch told McCarthy. "Little did I dream you would be so reckless and cruel as to do an injury to that lad. . . . I fear he shall always bear a scar needlessly inflicted by you. If it were in my power to forgive you for your reckless cruelty I would do so. I like to think than I am a gentle man, but your forgiveness will have to come from someone other than me."

McCarthy blundered forward and took up the theme again. Welch was ready and struck with force. "Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator," Welch said. "You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?"

Yet a good bit of McCarthy's base of support remained loyal. After the Welch drama, Gallup found that while McCarthy's favorability ratings were falling, 34 percent of the country still backed the senator...

By the end of the year the threat evaporated when the Senate censured McCarthy. The move to condemn him by resolution was the result of much of the Senate's revulsion against his reckless methods. Senator Ralph Flanders, Republican of Vermont, led the charge. "This matter is indeed a serious one," Flanders said. "The senator [McCarthy] has an habitual contempt for people. . . . Unrebuked, his behavior casts a blot upon the reputation of the Senate itself "

The resolution passed *(on Dec. 1, 1954)* by a vote of 67 to 22. *(only 22 of the Senate's 44 Republicans voted to censure).*

Once feared as indomitable, McCarthy was finished politically. He continued to drink heavily, and his health deteriorated. He died of acute hepatitis—his liver was inflamed, almost certainly because of his drinking—in 1957, at the age of forty-eight.

(203) By the end of 1954, McCarthy may have been spent, but the forces he represented - popular anxiety about the fate of the nation - would never completely subside. Like McCarthy, right-wing figures such as the John Birch Society's Robert Welch cast Eisenhower in the role of villain....

But we ought not to paint the rise of post–World War II movement conservatism—a movement that reached its apotheosis with the election of one of its early enthusiasts, Ronald Reagan, to the presidency in 1980—with too broad a brush. It is true that, as William A. Rusher, the publisher of William F. Buckley, Jr.'s *National Review*, the conservative magazine founded in 1955, recalled, "modern American conservatism largely organized itself during, and in explicit opposition to, the Eisenhower Administration." For most of those conservatives, however, Eisenhower was too moderate, not too Red. Writing in the inaugural issue of the magazine, Buckley, then twenty-nine years old, argued that the conservative mission was to stand "athwart history, yelling Stop"—history in this instance being understood as the flow of power to the state, which Buckley called "the dominant social feature of this century" Buckley's respectable conservatism was based not on paranoia but on a reasonable critique of the assumptions of midcentury liberalism.

Buckley, in fact, was a critical figure in moving the Birchers out of the mainstream conservative movement. In January 1961, Buckley was asked, "How would you define the Birch fallacy?" "The fallacy," Buckley replied, "is the assumption that you can infer subjective intention from objective consequence: we lost China to the Communists, therefore the President of the United States and the Secretary of State wished China to go to the Communists."

(206) Many others did not believe a distance of years was required to offer their verdict. His home-state Milwaukee journal wrote, "The harmful influence of McCarthy and McCarthyism was felt far beyond the world of politics. It injured American prestige in the eyes of the world.. . . Future generations are likely to find this period as fantastic, and harmful to the American spirit, as that of the Salem witch hunts, the post–Civil War Reconstruction or the Ku Klux Klan."

*(Roy Cohn was at McCarthy’s funeral)* A notable fixer, Cohn thrived at the nexus of law, politics, media, and society. "I don't want to know what the law is," he'd say of a case. "I want to know who the judge is." One of his more celebrated clients in after-years was a young real-estate developer who was looking to move into Manhattan from his family's base in Queens. And Roy Cohn was always there for Donald Trump.

CH. 7 - WHAT THE HELL IS THE PRESIDENCY FOR? "Segregation Forever," King's Crusade, and LBJ in the Crucible

(211) Lyndon Johnson couldn’t sleep. As Friday, November 22, 1963, turned into Saturday the twenty-third, the new president of the United States - he had taken the oath of office some eight hours before ...wanted to *move.* ...on this long Friday evening, he gave orders about everything he could think of. There was so much to do - a president to bury; a sudden, tragic transition to manage; a Cold War world to master.

“Well, I’m going to tell you; I’m going to pass the civil rights bill and not change one word of it...”

(212) As Johnson gathered himself to press ahead with the Kennedy administration’s civil rights legislation ...he was advised to go slow and to play it safe, at least until after the 1964 presidential election. As political a man as ever drew breath, Johnson, however, dismissed such counsel with a penetrating rhetorical question: “Well, what the hell is the presidency for?” he asked, if not to do the big things lesser men might not?

(213) A Texan with an astute sense of politics and a consuming ambition, he had erred on the side of appeasing his segregationist constituents... His commitment to the cause after Dallas forms one of the great chapters of personal transformation and of political courage in the history of the presidency—one akin to Lincoln's move from tolerance of slavery in 1861 to emancipation in 1862-63. "I've never felt freer in my life," LBJ remarked in January 1964. In the story of Johnson and civil rights we can see the difference a singular president can make when the circumstances are right—and when the voices of protest are steady and brave.

(214) In his November 1963 appearance before the Congress, Johnson said: “John Kennedy’s death commands what his life conveyed - that America must move forward. Let us turn away from the fanatics of the far left and the far right, from the apostles of bitterness and bigotry, from those defiant of law, and those who pour venom into our Nation’s bloodstream.”

(219) Elected governor in 1962, *(George Corley)* Wallace was inaugurated at the state capitol on January 14, 1963, at the site where Jefferson Davis had taken the oath as president of the Confederate States of America; Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where Martin Luther King, Jr., had been pastor from 1954 to 1960, sat a block away. Speaking from what he proudly called "this Cradle of the Confederacy, this very Heart of the Great Anglo-Saxon Southland," Wallace cried: "In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny and I say . . . segregation now . . . segregation tomorrow . . . segregation forever."

The crowd erupted. Wallace took a moment to wipe his nose in the winter cold, then plunged on. He knew what he was doing. "I'm gonna make race the basis of politics in this state," Wallace said before the inaugural, "and I'm gonna make it the basis of politics in this country" Wallace brought something intriguing to the modern politics of fear in America: a visceral connection to his crowds, an appeal that confounded elites but which gave him a durable base.

He provoked devotion and rage. Many adored him, revering him as a new savior; many others despaired of a future under his rule.

(220) In Wallace the Lost Cause found new relevance. In the months after his inauguration, the crisis came: A federal court ordered the integration of the University of Alabama. Wallace had pledged to stand in the schoolhouse door—as the popular phrase had it—to prevent just such a thing. He savored the hour, however hopeless it was... The federal government was the villain. States' rights were the salvation of the Founders' vision. White supremacy was to be protected by whatever means possible.

Yet Wallace failed. The Kennedy Justice Department enforced the court order, and the university was integrated. On the evening of the day federal officials compelled Wallace to stand aside, President Kennedy spoke to the nation. "Today," the president said, "we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free."

Kennedy's language was straightforward, his tone reasonable. "This is not a sectional issue," he said. "Difficulties over segregation and discrimination exist in every city, in every State of the Union, producing in many cities a rising tide of discontent that threatens the public safety. Nor is this a partisan issue. . . . We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution."

An elegant formulation, but Kennedy continued to speak in concrete terms, making the issue as tangible as he could: "If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public, if he cannot send his children to the best public school available, if he cannot vote for the public officials who represent him, if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place?"

(222) On the evening of Kennedy’s funeral in Washington, Johnson tracked *(Martin Luther)* King down in New York City... “I’m going to support ‘em all and you can count on that,” Johnson said. “And I’m going to do my best to get other men to do likewise and I’ll have to have your help. I never needed it more’n I do now.”

(223) On the night *(December 1955, King)* first spoke to a mass meeting on the boycott *(of public transportation, after Rosa Parks was arrested after declining to surrender her seat on a Montgomery city bus to a white passenger)* King sensed the possibilities of the moment... “we are American citizens - and we are determined to apply our citizenship - to the fullness of its meaning.”

(224) From that moment until his assassination on the balcony of a Memphis motel in April 1968, King would lead a complex movement of nonviolent protest against segregation and for economic justice. His house in Montgomery was bombed within two months of his debut boycott sermon. "Nigger, we are tired of you and your mess now," a caller told King on the telephone after the attack. "If you aren't out of this town in three days, we're going to blow your brains out and blow up your house." In the face of such hate, King's faith sustained him. "Lord, I'm down here trying to do what's right," he prayed after the call. "But Lord I must confess that I'm weak now I'm faltering, I'm losing my courage."

By making a nonviolent case against segregation, King and innumerable others appealed to the nation's conscience in memorable campaigns—from sit-ins to Freedom Rides to Mississippi's Freedom Summer to the Children's Crusade in Birmingham. Protest and high politics—the crucial forces that history usually requires to make great changes—intersected most notably, perhaps, on August 28, 1963, at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

King's address to the march that afternoon was not going well, or at least not as well as he had hoped. The day had been long; the crowds massed before the Lincoln Memorial were ready for some rhetorical adrenaline, some true poetry King's task was to lift his speech from the ordinary to the historic, from the mundane to the sacred. He was standing before the greatest audience of his life. Yet with the television networks broadcasting live and President Kennedy watching from the White House, King was struggling with a text that had been drafted by too many hands late the previous night.

Then there was the sound of a woman's voice ...the singer Mahalia Jackson spoke up. "Tell 'em about the dream, Martin." He left his text altogether at this point—a departure that put him on a path to speaking words of American scripture, words as essential to the nation's destiny in their way as those of Lincoln, before whose memorial King stood, and those of Jefferson, whose monument lay to the preacher's right, toward the Potomac. The moments of ensuing oratory lifted King above the tumult of history and made him a figure of history...

"I say to you today, my friends . . even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream," King said. "It is a dream deeply rooted in the American Dream"—a dream that had been best captured in the promise of words written in a distant summer in Philadelphia by Jefferson. "I have a dream," King continued, "that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

Drawing on the Bible and "My Country 'Tis of Thee," on the Emancipation Proclamation and the Constitution, King projected an ideal vision of an exceptional nation. In King's imagined country, hope triumphed over the fear. In doing so, King defined the best of the nation as surely as Jefferson did in Philadelphia in 1776 or Lincoln did at Gettysburg in 1863.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.. ..

I have a dream today.

(228) In the months after the Kennedy assassination, the new president pressed his old colleagues on Capitol Hill to give the civil rights bill a full and fair trial. ...(230) Johnson went to work on members of the House... *(later said)* “I don’t intend to cavil or compromise"—a phrase Johnson had also used on the night of the assassination.

"You may do that," Russell said. "But it's going to cost you the South, and cost you the [1964 presidential] election."

"If that's the price I have to pay," Johnson said, "I'll pay it gladly."

Which was not strictly true—Johnson never found anything gladdening about political defeat. But it says much about his commitment to doing the right thing that he was willing even to entertain the possibility of sacrificing the presidency itself for the cause of a single bill.

(230) The president did not believe such a large legislative and cultural undertaking could be done on a partisan line vote. "Unless we have the Republicans joining us and helping us," Johnson told Humphrey, "we'll have a mutiny in this goddamn country, so we've got to make this an American bill and not just a Democratic bill."

(231) He signed the Civil Rights Act of1964 in the East Room on Thursday, July 2. On the 1964 bill, Johnson had risen to the occasion created by the voices of protest - had, in fact, surpassed the occasion. And he knew that he and his party would pay a political price. “It is an important gain,” Johnson told Bill Moyers after signing the 1964 law, “but I think we just delivered the South to the Republican Party for a long time to come.”

(234) *(In New Orleans, October 1964, during the campaign)* Johnson said, "If we are to heal our history and make this Nation whole, prosperity must know no Mason-Dixon line and opportunity must know no color line." He called for unity against the forces of fear. "Now, the people that would use us and destroy us first divide us. . . . If they divide us, they can make some hay. And all these years they have kept their foot on our necks by appealing to our animosities, and dividing us."

Now was the time, the president said, to rise above racism. "Whatever your views are, we have a Constitution and we have a Bill of Rights, and we have the law of the land, and two-thirds of the Democrats in the Senate voted for [the Civil Rights Bill of 1964] and three-fourths of the Republicans," Johnson said. "I signed it, and I am going to enforce it, and I am going to observe it, and I think any man that is worthy of the high office of President is going to do the same thing.... I am not going to let them build up the hate and try to buy my people by appealing to their prejudice."

(235) The crowd was shocked—and then rose to give the president a prolonged ovation. "Many of his most acerbic critics have affirmed that this was Johnson's finest hour," the historian William E. Leuchtenburg wrote. "There was no way a northerner could have delivered that speech and had it carry the same meaning." Johnson had done what he had come to do. Determined to preach the gospel of inclusion in the segregated South, he had done so, he recalled, "not in New York or Chicago or Los Angeles, but in New Orleans—near home, in my own backyard."

In November LBJ won a full presidential term in his own right with 61.1 percent of the popular vote in a forty-four-state landslide; Goldwater took just six states. (Though, with the exception of Arizona, Goldwater's victories all came in the old Confederacy and included Louisiana, where Johnson had made his impassioned plea for civil rights.)

(242) On the evening of March 15, 1965 Lyndon Johnson entered the chamber of the House of Representatives with a purposeful stride. He did not pause to shake many hands as he walked to the well; he had work to do. *(Alabama state troopers had beat a line of violent demonstrators in Selma on March 7, captured on prime-time network television)* Standing at the rostrum with Vice President Humphrey and Speaker of the House John McCormack behind him, the president began to speak. He did so slowly. Johnson's public cadences could be unctuous, even ponderous, as he sought to infuse his public rhetoric with solemnity. Tonight, the tone was just right. He seemed, for once for a public man, free from political calculation or pragmatic consideration. "I speak tonight for the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy" Johnson said. "I urge every member of both parties, Americans of all religions and of all colors, from every section of this country, to join me in that cause." He went on:

At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's

unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was a century ago at

Appomattox. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama. . . .

In our time we have come to live with moments of great crisis. Our lives have been marked with debate about great issues; issues of war and peace, issues of prosperity and depression. But rarely in any time does an issue lay bare the secret heart of America itself Rarely are we met with a challenge, not to our growth or abundance, our welfare or our security, but rather to the values and the purposes and the meaning of our beloved Nation.

The issue of equal rights for American Negroes is such an issue. And should we defeat every enemy, should we double our wealth and conquer the stars, and still be unequal to this issue, then we will have failed as a people and as a nation.

For with a country as with a person, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Here, for the first time, the lawmakers and guests were moved from reverie to applause. The evocation of scripture—Johnson was quoting the words of Jesus from the Gospel of St. Mark—resonated. The president continued:

There is no Negro problem. There is no Southern problem. There is no Northern problem. There is only an American problem. And we are met here tonight as Americans—not as Democrats or Republicans—we are met here as Americans to solve that problem...

What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and State of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life.

Their cause must be our cause too. Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.

And we shall overcome.

(244) "It is difficult to fight for freedom," Johnson said as he signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 in August. "But I also know how difficult it can be to bend long years of habit and custom to grant it. There is no room for injustice anywhere in the American mansion. But there is always room for understanding toward those who see the old ways crumbling. And to them today I say simply this: It must come. It is right that it should come."

(245) The setting was splendid, the congregation rapt, the preacher at ease. On the morning of the same day Johnson made his evening announcement about withdrawing from the 1968 campaign *(March 31, 1968)*, Martin Luther King was in Washington to offer a Lenten sermon at the National Cathedral. Easter was two weeks away, but King's mind was more on the world beyond the cathedral's splendid stained glass than it was on the details of the Christian calendar. Standing in the ornate Canterbury pulpit, gazing out across the sprawling nave, King summoned his listeners to the hard work of the Gospel.

"We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality," King said. "And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the way God's universe is made; this is the way it is structured."

He would be dead before the week was out.

(248) Even then the fates were not yet satisfied. In April, Jacqueline Kennedy had shared a premonition of disaster. "Do you know what I think will happen to Bobby?" she asked Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. "The same thing that happened to Jack . . . There is so much hatred in this country" She was proved correct in June, when RFK was gunned down in the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles after winning the California primary

(249) Though much of his presidency was consumed by the war in Vietnam, Johnson's domestic legacy is enormous. In addition to Medicare and the other legislation of the Great Society, he signed the landmark Immigration and Nationality Act on Liberty Island in 1965, eliminating the national-origins quotas in force since the early 1920s and opening the doors of the country more widely. And a single word in the 1964 Civil Rights Act—"sex"----included gender in the bill's protections. The addition of women to the legislation helped give the rising women's movement an important legislative victory as they fought for equality.

CONCLUSION - THE FIRST DUTY OF AN AMERICAN CITIZEN

*The people have often made mistakes, but given time and the facts, they will make the corrections*.

- Harry S. Truman

*Begin with the little thing, and do not expect to accomplish anything without an effort.*

- Theodore Roosevelt

(255) Harry Truman knew there'd be hell to pay, but he went ahead anyway. In the first months of 1948 he dispatched his ten-point civil rights program to Congress. It was a revolutionary call for a new day of fairness and equality, and the president framed his proposals as part and parcel of what Truman called "our American faith."

To be sure, like many of his countrymen, Truman was no saint on matters of race...

But as president of the United States, he saw his duty whole... In his public capacity he transcended the limitations of his personal background.

(256) At a White House luncheon for the executive committee of the Democratic National Committee, a committeewoman from Alabama, Mrs. Leonard Thomas, confronted the president. "I want to take a message back to the South," Mrs. Thomas said to Truman. "Can I tell them you're not ramming miscegenation down our throats? That you're for all the people, not just the North?"

The president thought the moment right for a history lesson. Then and there, in front of the leaders of his party in a contentious time just ahead of a closely fought presidential election, Truman reached for American scripture—the Bill of Rights.

Taking a copy of the Constitution from his pocket, the president, in his flat Missouri accent, began to read. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances,” Truman said, then moved on from amendment to amendment, enumerating the liberties of the people—all of the people. When he finished, he declared himself immovable on civil rights. "I'm everybody's president"

(258) In the main, the America of the twenty-first century is, for all its shortcomings, freer and more accepting than it has ever been. If that weren’t the case, right-wing populist attacks on immigrants and the widening mainstream wouldn’t be so ferocious.

(259) The only way to make sense of this eternal struggle is to understand that it is just that: an eternal struggle. And the only way to come to that understanding is by knowing the history that's shaped us. "The next generation never learns anything from the previous one until it's brought home with a hammer," Truman once said. "I've wondered why the next generation can't profit from the generation before but they never do until they get knocked in the head by experience."

So what can we, in our time, learn from the past, even while we're getting knocked in the head? That the perfect should not be the enemy of the good. That compromise is the oxygen of democracy. And that we learn the most from those who came before not by gazing up at them uncritically or down on them condescendingly but by looking them in the eye and taking their true measure as human beings, not as gods.

Which brings us to the moral utility of history. It is tempting to feel superior to the past. But as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., once said, "Righteousness is easy, also cheap, in retrospect." When we condemn posterity for slavery, or for Native American removal, or for denying women their full role in the life of the nation, we ought to pause and think: What injustices are we perpetuating even now that will one day face the harshest of verdicts by those who come after us? One of the points of reflecting on the past is to prepare us for action in the present.

As Truman knew—and the visiting Southerner, to her discomfort, learned at that White House luncheon—the presidency offers possibilities for such action that are both dazzling and daunting. "The President," Woodrow Wilson wrote, "is at liberty, both in law and conscience, to be as big a man as he can." In an echo of that point, in his speech at American University in June 1963 proposing a ban on nuclear testing, JFK said, "Man can be as big as he wants."

Or as small. One risk we always face can grow out of the anger of crowds—literal and, in our own time, also virtual—of the alienated and the emboldened. In 1935, W.E.B. Du Bois plumbed the mind and motives of the Ku Klux Klan, and indeed of mobs and mass movements driven by fear in all times and at all places. “The method of force which hides itself in secrecy is a method as old as humanity,” Du Bois wrote.

(260) The better presidents do not cater to such forces; they conquer them with a breadth of vision that speaks to the best parts of our soul.

(261) In his Farewell Address in January 1989, Reagan addressed himself to America's generosity of spirit in his evocation of John Winthrop's "city upon a hill"—an image, in a sign of some consistency of thought among those who have led the nation, that John Kennedy had cited in his 1961 speech to the Massachusetts legislature as he prepared to leave for his inauguration in Washington. "I've spoken of the shining city all my political life," Reagan said, "but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it." He went on:

But in my mind it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, windswept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it, and see it still. . . . And she's still a beacon, still a magnet for all who must have freedom, for all the pilgrims from all the lost places who are hurtling through the darkness, toward home.

In 1995, when Timothy McVeigh, darkly inspired by anti- Semitism, white nationalism, and antigovernment sentiment, bombed the federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 168, including 19 children in the facility's day-care center, leaders of both major parties said and did the right things. "Let us let our own children know that we will stand against the forces of fear," President Clinton told mourners in Oklahoma City "When there is talk of hatred, let us stand up and talk against it. When there is talk of violence, let us stand up and talk against it. In the face of death, let us honor life. As St. Paul admonished us, Let us 'not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

(263) In Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, late n the presidency of Barack Obama, a young white supremacist murdered nine innocents during a Bible study group at a church... As the president eulogized one of the victims he spoke of hope and hate and history:

According to the Christian tradition grace is not earned... as a nation, out of this terrible tragedy, God has visited grace upon us for he has allowed us to see where we’ve been blind. He has given ut the chance, where we’ve been lost, to find our best selves. For too long, we’ve been blind to the way past injustices continue to shape the present. Perhaps we see that now. Perhaps this tragedy causes us to ask some tough questions about how we can permit so many of our children to languish in poverty or attend dilapidated schools or grow up without prospects for a job or for a career. Perhaps it causes us to examine what we’re doing to cause some of our child to hate.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, Obama began to sing the old hymn: *Amazing grace...*

(266) Humankind is forever coping with crisis, or believes it is... We have managed, however, to survive the crises and vicissitudes of history. Our brightest hours are almost never as bright as we like to think; our glummest moments are rarely as irredeemable as they feel at the time. How, then, in an hour of anxiety about the future of the country, at a time when a president of the United States appears determined to undermine the rule of law, a free press, and the sense of hope essential to American life, can those with deep concerns about the nation's future enlist on the side of the angels?

ENTER THE ARENA

The battle begins with political engagement itself. Theodore Roosevelt put it best: "The first duty of an American citizen, then, is that he shall work in politics; his second duty is that he shall do that work in a practical manner; and his third is that it shall be done in accord with the highest principles of honor and justice."

Those who disdain the arena are unilaterally disarming themselves in the great contests of the soul, for they are cutting themselves off, childishly, from what Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., called the "passion and action" of the age... One need not become a candidate (though that's certainly an option worth considering) or a political addict hooked on every twist and every turn and every tweet. But the paying of attention, the expressing of opinion, and the casting of ballots are foundational to living up to the obligations of citizenship in a republic.

To believe something creates an obligation to make that belief known and to act upon it within the arena. Politicians are far more often mirrors of public sentiment than they are molders; that is the nature of things in a popular government and should be a source of hope for those who long for a change of presidents or of policy...

Skepticism about the incumbent authority of the moment is embedded in our character, for what was the American Revolution but one of history's largest and boldest acts of reform in the cause of progress? "The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions that I wish it to be always kept alive," Thomas Jefferson wrote Abigail Adams in the winter of 1787. "It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all. I like a little rebellion now and then. It is like a storm in the Atmosphere." So long as the resistance was informed by fact and executed with integrity Jefferson believed, all would be well.

RESIST TRIBALISM

(267) Engagement, especially at a time of heightened conflict, has its perils: Those motivated by what they see as extremism on the other side are likely to view politics not as a mediation of difference, but as total warfare where no quarter can be given. The country works best, however, when we resist such tribal inclinations. "We know instinctively," Jane Addams wrote, "that if we grow contemptuous of our fellows and consciously limit our intercourse to certain kinds of people whom we have previously decided to respect, we not only tremendously circumscribe our range of life, but limit the scope of our ethics." Ever practical, Eleanor Roosevelt offered a prescription to guard against tribal self-certitude. "It is not only important but mentally invigorating to discuss political matters with people whose opinions differ radically from one's own..." she wrote. “If we are to cope intelligently with a changing world, we must be flexible and willing to relinquish opinions that no longer have any bearing on existing conditions."

Wisdom generally comes from a free exchange of ideas, and there can be no free exchange of ideas if everyone on your side already agrees with one another. "I have been fiercely partisan in politics and always militantly liberal," Harry Truman recalled. "I will be that way as long as I live. Yet I think we would lose something important to our political life if the conservatives were all in one party and the liberals all in the other. This would make us a nation divided either into two opposing and irreconcilable camps or into even smaller and more contentious groups."

RESPECT FACTS AND DEPLOY REASON

(268) There is such a thing as discernible reality. Facts, as John Adams once said, are stubborn things, and yet too many Americans are locked into their particular vision of the world, choosing this view or that perspective based not on its grounding in fact but on whether it's a view or perspective endorsed by the leaders one follows. "The dictators of the world say that if you tell a lie often enough, why, people will believe it," Truman wrote. "Well, if you tell the truth often enough, they'll believe it and go along with you."

To reflexively resist one side or the other without weighing the merits of a given issue is all too common—and all too regrettable. By closing our minds to the even remote possibility that a political leader with whom we nearly always disagree might have a point about a particular matter is to preemptively surrender the capacity of the mind to shape our public lives. Of course, it may be that you believe, after consideration, that the other side is wrong—but at least take a minute to make sure. To expect to get everything you want simply because you want it is to invite frustration. Reform is slow work, and it is for neither the fainthearted nor the impatient.

FIND A CRITICAL BALANCE

(269) "Wherever the people are well informed they can be trusted with their own government," Jefferson wrote in 1789, adding: "Whenever things get so far wrong as to attract their notice, they may be relied on to set them to rights." Being informed is more than knowing details and arguments. It also entails being humble enough to recognize that only on the rarest of occasions does any single camp have a monopoly on virtue or on wisdom.

American presidents are not mythic figures. They are human beings, with good days and bad days, flashes of genius and the occasional dumb idea, alternately articulate and tongue-tied. If we are sympathetic rather than blindly condemnatory or celebratory, we will, I believe, help create a more rational political climate...

This injunction of TR's remains resonant: "To announce that there must be no criticism of the president, or that we are to stand by the president, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public." Even with their manifold failings, journalists who seek to report and to illuminate rather than to opine and to divide are critical to a democracy.

In a Christmas-time 1962 "Conversation with the President" in the Oval Office with three television network interviewers, Kennedy acknowledged the importance of a free press:

I think [the press] is invaluable, even though . . . it is never pleasant to be reading things that are not agreeable news. But I would say that it is an invaluable arm of the Presidency ... There is a terrific disadvantage [in] not having the abrasive quality of the press applied to you daily. . . . Even though we never like it, and even though we wish they didn't write it, and even though we disapprove, there isn't any doubt that we could not do the job at all in a free society without a very, very active press.

KEEP HISTORY IN MIND

(270) A grasp of the past can be orienting... The past and the present tell us, too, that demagogues can only thrive when a substantial portion of the people want him to. In *The American Commonwealth*, James Bryce warned of the dangers of a renegade president. Bryce's view was not that the individual himself, from the White House, could overthrow the Constitution. Disaster would come, Bryce believed, at the hands of a demagogic president with an enthusiastic public base. "A bold President who knew himself to be supported by a majority in the country, might be tempted to override the law, and deprive the minority of the protection which the law affords it..." The cheering news is that hope is not lost. "The people have often made mistakes," Harry Truman said, "but given time and the facts, they will make the corrections."

(271) Lincoln, who gave us the image of our better angels, should have the last word. "He was a president who understood people, and when it came time to make decisions, he was willing to take the responsibility and make those decisions no matter how difficult they were," Truman wrote. "He had a good head and a great brain and a kind heart. . . . He was the best kind of ordinary man, and when I say that he was an ordinary man, I mean that as high praise, not deprecation. That's the highest praise you can give a man, that he's one of the people and becomes distinguished in the service that he gives other people. I don't know of any higher compliment you can pay a man than that."

To the veterans returning to Ohio after the battle of Fort Stevens in 1864, Lincoln made some brief remarks as they prepared to go west. No one knew when the war would end; no one knew if Lincoln, who was facing reelection in November, would even be president in a matter of months. He spoke not with the poetry of Gettysburg, but his words on that August day said much about why the salvation of the Union would repay any price in blood and toil and treasure. The tall, tired president, his face heavily lined, his burdens unimaginable, was straightforward:

It is in order that each one of you may have, through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field, and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise, and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life with all its desirable human aspirations—it is for this that the struggle should be maintained, that we may not lose our birthrights—not only for one, but for two or three years, if necessary. The nation is worth fighting for, to secure such an inestimable jewel.

For all of our darker impulses, for all of our shortcomings, and for all of the dreams denied and deferred, the experiment begun so long ago, carried out so imperfectly, is worth the fight. There is, in fact, no struggle more important, and none nobler, than the one we wage in the service of those better angels who, however besieged, are always ready for battle.

Rex Mitchell, last modified 1/27/19