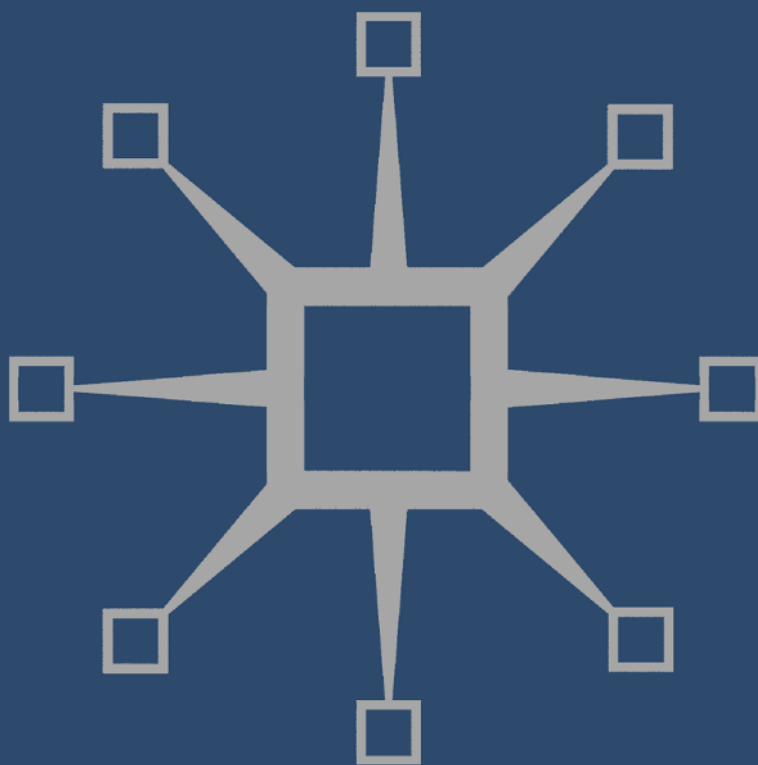


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Political Conflict in
America

Alan Ware



Political Conflict in America

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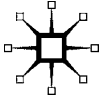
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Alan Ware

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POLITICAL CONFLICT IN AMERICA

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For all my students at the University of Warwick (1972–90) and the University of Oxford
(1990–2012)

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Preface

During the course of writing, and frequently rewriting, this book I have changed its focus on several occasions. It began as an attempt to explain how and why American politics was different from politics in other democracies. After 40 years of research on the United States it seemed to me that foreigners frequently had a misleading impression of how American politics worked. Americans too often misunderstand why their politics differs from political practice in other countries. Much has been said on this subject over the years that has “missed the point.” I wanted to ask “big questions” about how and why American politics was distinctive. However, it soon became obvious that, conceived in this way, the project was too unwieldy and would result in a book that would be overly long and complex for anyone to be willing to persist in reading it for very long. I continued to want to take a broad view of the dynamics of politics in the United States in my writing. However, I came to the conclusion that I had to do this by focusing on a somewhat narrower issue that lies at the heart of the differences in which I am interested. This issue is why many political conflicts seem to endure in the United States when in most democracies issues are often “settled” over time, and the political agenda can then move forward. Not only does conflict endure in America, there are also periods in its history when those conflicts have been especially ferocious. We are living in such an era now. Contemporary politics is a battleground in America, and the intensity of the battle has increased markedly during the decades in which I have been conducting research.

Obviously, politics everywhere has always been about conflict, but there is a distinctively enduring and fierce quality to social and political divisions in America. European visitors have long commented on this, and, for example, the reader will find the occasional quotation from the likes of Charles Dickens on the subject. In a real sense there is nothing new about the current world of the Tea Party and Jon Stewart. Why there is nothing exceptional about it is largely what this book is about. In many ways the arguments that I develop are at odds with how many political scientists understand the dynamics of the American polity, and I hope that my analysis stimulates debate. In writing the book, I have tried to strike a balance between focusing on broad themes while citing my sources in

the way that scholarship demands. For that reason, and to avoid the book becoming too voluminous, I have tried to deploy a relatively light touch in footnoting. It may well be that in attempting this I will satisfy neither those readers who feel that a provocative argument should be free of distractions nor other readers who would want more complete citations of the relevant literatures. I apologize to both camps.

I have incurred many intellectual debts along the way. A number of kind friends, as well as people whose identity I am unaware of, have read all or parts of the manuscript and generously offered comments and criticisms. In particular I would like to thank Nigel Bowles, David Hitt, Joni Lovenduski, Helen Margetts, Jeremy Parsons, Jeff Stonecash, and Jane Ware, as well as two anonymous reviewers for my publisher, Palgrave Macmillan. I published my first book with Palgrave (back in 1979) when it was known in the United Kingdom as Macmillan and I am pleased that this latest attempt to make sense of the complexities of American politics is also on their list. I appreciate the enthusiastic support of my editor, Robyn Curtis, but I also wish to thank her British-based colleague Steven Kennedy. I have known Steven for many years, and it was thanks to him that I was put in contact with Robyn. Finally, I wish to thank Ildi Clarke for preparing the index.

Needless to say, “the buck stops here” so I must take sole responsibility for any errors that appear in the book.

Alan Ware
Worcester College, Oxford University

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In 1973 the author Jessica Mitford was appointed Distinguished Professor at San Jose State University. Before taking up the post, she was required to swear that she would support and defend the constitutions of the United States and California. Subsequently she wrote to one of her sisters:

[T]he annotated Constitution of the state of California runs to three hefty volumes and covers all manner of subjects. Do I support and defend, for example, Article 4, Section 25 3/4, limiting boxing and wrestling matches to 15 rounds? I don't know. Perhaps it should be 14 or 16 rounds?¹

Mitford had come up against one of the distinctive features of American politics: the incorporation into state constitutions of substantive, and sometimes trivial, items of legislation. State constitutions can be littered with such laws. Frequently it is because a bill's supporters recognize that repealing or modifying the legislation becomes more difficult should it form part of the constitution. If there is a large enough majority in the state legislature to make a measure a constitutional requirement, then politicians may well be tempted to do so. Protecting cherished legislation and policies from opponents is a serious matter in the United States because one of the main characteristics of politics is that conflicts can endure. Much remains unsettled, or at least there is a perception that this is so. Some political battles persist long after they would have subsided in many other democracies. In America, any controversial issue is more likely to become the political equivalent of a running sore.

Enactment of a policy just prompts the deployment of new strategies directed against it; opponents tend not to recognize that a matter has been resolved and that different issues might have to be addressed instead. A poignant example of this was a much reported comment in April 2010 by Sarah Palin, who told her audience of fellow Republicans, "Don't retreat—reload."² At the time her advice about a suitable response to the passage of the Obama administration's health care bill attracted considerable publicity, with most of it focusing on her

obvious use of the language of violence. Virtually no attention was paid to the fact that here was yet another American policy that was being challenged by its opponents immediately after its adoption. This fact attracted no comment because comparatively little is ever fixed in American politics—for example, an announcement of the continuation of a “war” is news of the “dog bites postal worker” variety. It has always been thus. When, for instance, in 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court declared racial segregation illegal in a 9–0 verdict, the reaction of southern Democrats was to mobilize to prevent its implementation. Perhaps the most famous expression of determination that the opposition would endure was George Wallace’s in 1963. On swearing the oath at his inauguration as Georgia’s governor, he proclaimed, “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.” Numerous other examples of “drawing a line in the dust” might be cited. All expose a fundamental aspect of politics in the United States: it is not harmonious in nature, and one dimension of that lack of harmony is the continuation of long-standing disputes. Of course, in an obvious sense politics everywhere is about conflict. However, a crucial and distinctive characteristic of American politics lies in the persistence of contention, in the adversarial style that is often deployed, and in the intensity of feeling that this can produce. Complete reconciliation with defeat is less usual than in many other democracies. What would be regarded as a final victory, a settlement, and an end to the matter abroad is often merely “another round” there. Many new issues may come into the public arena, but only some issues actually go away, or go away quietly and quickly. That conflicts tend to endure does not mean, of course, that the political system is necessarily gridlocked; it may well not be.³

The cause of this “politics of conflict” does not lie in America’s population containing proportionately large numbers of extremists. Most Americans are moderates. Over the years social science surveys have consistently revealed that on nearly all issues the views of Americans tend to converge on their country’s political center ground, as happens in all long-established democracies.⁴ Because the American public itself is not highly polarized, the explanation for the persistence of political disputes has to lie elsewhere. The problem is located in the creating of consensus through the political process. Unlike most democracies, consensus is difficult to achieve in the United States—both in enacting policies in the first place and in their remaining unchallenged afterward.

The most common explanation for this pattern of politics is that the decentralization of power in the American political system makes it difficult to create and sustain political majorities. In brief, the argument proceeds as follows: the constitutional arrangements established by the founding fathers in 1787 did not have the intended effect of reducing political conflict, but actually made it less likely that permanent consensus would arise.⁵ While this forms part of a full account of why agreement is often so difficult to achieve, it is only one of the causes. The main argument of this book is that the social and ideological divisions that underpin American politics, combined with the historical development of

political competition there, have reinforced the consequences of the constitutional settlement of 1787. Between them all these factors have pushed American politics down a path that makes political rancor seem far more ingrained than in many other mature democracies.

Especially among America's presidents, there is nearly always a marked contrast between the rhetoric of a desire for cooperation with political opponents, in the interests of building consensus, and how politics actually works. As George W. Bush did in 2001, presidents typically emphasize their aim to unite the nation at their inauguration. However, as it was for all his predecessors and also his successor, Bush's claim that "we are confident in principles that unite and lead us onwards" was little more than an exhortation of groundless hope over experience. Much of what any president can expect from a term of office is wrangling with political opponents, conflict that usually trumps any attempt at the unity proclaimed on taking office. Barack Obama's experience in 2009–10 was not wholly unusual therefore. However, while the possibility of taking a losing fight onto another stage often contributes to the fierceness of the struggle, not all periods in American history have witnessed quite the intensity evident during the last 20 years. In fact, there has been significant variation over time in the acrimony displayed by opponents.

For a number of reasons the Obama presidency has been one in which the contesting of American politics has exhibited particular rancor. The development of more polarized politics in Congress, from the later 1980s onward, was one factor responsible for this. The impact of the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent economic recession also made an important contribution. That the administration was attempting major initiatives in public policy—in the regulation of Wall Street as well as in health care—at the time of a huge federal government deficit inevitably produced opposition that facilitated the demise of comity. Of course, antagonistic political behavior would have been evident in other democracies faced with a parallel situation. However, the particular twist on the outcome in the United States is that in many ways it was very much politics in the normal American mold, if a more extreme version of it. A major crisis is not required to occasion animosity among politicians. Anyone who follows American politics, whether a citizen or a foreign observer, recognizes that the long endurance of disputes really does seem to rest at its heart. It would be easy to make an American virtue out of this—by emphasizing the ability of the country's political institutions to contain the continuing internal political divisions without that entire system fracturing. Could other regimes do as well in such conditions, it might be asked? Yet, with only a few exceptions, general accounts of how American democracy works—whether in student textbooks, television documentaries, or whatever—rarely focus on the matter.⁶ Specific instances of high political tension—whether they are the civil rights protests of the 1960s or the attempted impeachment of Bill Clinton in 1998—are well-known and discussed. For the most part, though, they tend to be treated as unusual. However, while less heated than these extreme cases, the "normal" battle for advantage in America is usually relentless.

Rather than being celebrated as evidence of a regime's survival against the odds, the aggressive contestation that characterizes American politics is often glossed over. Too much has usually been read by scholars, commentators, and journalists into the notion of "E pluribus unum" ("out of many, one"), which until 1956 was long regarded as the country's unofficial motto.⁷ Certainly, American social diversity has produced a single nation, in which most citizens have a strong sense of identity of being American. Indeed, many would argue that this identity, as expressed, for example, in public support for its national sports' teams or individual American athletes, is deeper than in most other countries.⁸ Yet to focus on the "unum" can be to ignore the social diversity and the divisions that persist within the country. Americans may be remarkably solid in the defense of their country, its institutions, and their way of life when it is attacked or criticized from outside, yet alongside that "unum" can continue beliefs that internal opponents are not just wrong, but often dangerously wrong. The United States is not Switzerland—with its largely tranquil and consensual politics maintained within its decentralized and self-governing cantons writ large. That is, it is not a country in which social diversity can be managed by a combination of extensive local control (by and for the separate subcultures) and with broad and stable coalitions governing at the national level. In the United States the different subcultures are only imperfectly contained within the territorial boundaries of states. Moreover, unlike Switzerland, the national level of politics is not an arena in which the dominant mode of operating is political cooperation.⁹ As one of the mid-twentieth century's most perceptive historians of its political institutions pointed out, the United States is a difficult country to govern.¹⁰ Although one not identified by Herbert Nicholas himself, a principal reason for governing being difficult is the nature and extent of long-standing cleavages in American society. Indeed, Dr. Johnson's infamously sexist remark about women preachers when he compared them to dogs walking on their hind legs—"It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all"—is actually relevant here. Governing America as a single country would always have been difficult because of both the kinds of divisions that were present at the republic's founding and those emerging subsequently. Had they been faced with this, many other rulers would likely have found it difficult to govern at all. What then continues to make governing so hard in the United States? And why is American politics, with its enduring conflicts and evident rancor between opponents, so distinctive in the democratic world?

Before turning to these matters it is important to be clear about what is not being argued here as well as what is.

First, this book is not claiming that every issue is fought over by opponents who give no quarter. That is patently false: no country could be governed at all if every initiative was obstructed on all occasions. In fact, within all democracies there are many factors that contribute to most policies being arenas free from bitter contestation. As Baumgartner and Jones argue, when explaining the prevalence of stability in politics, two of the most significant sources are "the crush of other issues that are constantly competing for space on the public agenda and the

shared understandings of the complexity of public policy that characterize the professional communities of policy experts.”¹¹ Many areas of public policy in the United States are stable precisely in this way.

Second, even at their most intense, conflicts in the United States since the Civil War have rarely reflected a determination on the part of many activists to wreck the political system, or to come close to that. Conflict takes place in a context in which the basic rules of the political game are broadly accepted, although interpretations of what those rules are may well be contested. The failure of the 11 southern states to secede successfully in 1861 ended forever the attraction of the “wrecking” option for the politically disgruntled. One of the long-term lessons of the Union’s military victory in 1865 was that the political equivalent of “picking up your bat, abandoning the game, and going home,” because you did not like the way the game was going, was not a viable alternative. The only option was to keep on playing the game. Targeted civil disobedience, as would be used by the civil rights movement in the mid-twentieth century, was acceptable; seeking to disrupt the entire political process itself, or to replace it by illegal means, was not. Nevertheless, irrespective of what else it did, the Civil War did not make American politics more tranquil.¹²

Third, the steam behind one side of a campaign can sometimes be lost even in long-standing disputes; at some point it may become evident that victory is impossible. Prohibition is an obvious example of this. From the mid-nineteenth century until the eighteenth amendment was ratified in 1919, prohibition provided a clear example of the persistence of a political conflict. Yet the adverse social effects of prohibition evident in the 1920s, together with the decisive repeal of the eighteenth amendment in 1933, resulted in its complete disappearance from politics thereafter.¹³

Fourth, the continuation of some conflicts, when in all likelihood in similar circumstances defeated participants elsewhere would have thrown in the towel after a seeming defeat, does not imply that American policy reversals are actually that common. The experience of prohibition from 1919 to 1933 is unusual. Significant redefinitions of a policy status quo occur in about only 1 case in 20.¹⁴ However, the striking feature of American politics, when compared with most democracies, is the belief among defeated protagonists that eventually they *can* still prevail on matters they believe in strongly. In some respects, therefore, American politics might appear to be characterized by the triumph of hope over experience.

Fifth, like all political elites and when they can, those in America try to rewrite the rules of the policy game so as to prevent disorder. They are normally most successful in doing this when it can be demonstrated to those politicians who might block the proposed re-writing that America’s national interests would be harmed by a perpetuation of the usual political “free for all.” So, during the twentieth century, executive agreements tended to replace treaties as the way of regulating America’s relations with other countries; the executive branch could thereby bypass potential opponents in the senate.¹⁵ Similarly, the Fast Track Negotiating Authority on foreign trade agreements, which was available to the president

after the mid-1970s, was a device used to limit the opportunities in Congress for domestic opponents of trade deals to “eat away” at the terms negotiated by the executive.¹⁶ Yet, in the case of Fast Track, the circumventing of opposition still had to be approved by Congress before each set of negotiations, reducing the autonomy the executive might otherwise enjoy. Because potential opponents are unlikely to give up their weapons willingly, preventing disorder by “disarming” them is a strategy that is usually of limited scope in overcoming the decentralization of the American political system. Particularly on issues about which grassroots political activists are likely to feel strongly, elected politicians are always reluctant to trade away powers in the interests of greater efficiency in the policy process.

In considering these points together it should be clear that the distinctive feature of American democracy—its combative nature—is more a matter of degree than of its having a truly unique form of democracy. Nonetheless, how and why it differs from most other democracies is important. Moreover, examining those differences across the entire history of the United States enables the heightened tensions evident in recent years to be placed in a broader context.

Obviously, a rancorous mode of democratic politics is not unique to the United States, Israel being another exemplar among the established democracies.¹⁷ However, of those countries that became fully democratic before the last quarter of the twentieth century, the United States is somewhat unusual. That it is not like other countries is a claim that is frequently made, of course. Many Americans have asserted over the years that their politics is different from politics in other countries, and they have been right to do so. However, often the differences have not been identified correctly or have been misunderstood. This is true of those who defend the political system as well as of those who are critical of it. Too frequently the former “airbrush” processes in ways that make it appear that politics is largely about peaceful resolution of disagreements following rational debate. For many critics, on the other hand, American democracy is no more than a screen behind which a ruthless struggle between economic interests is taking place. Both views can be misleading. There is a more genuinely popular element to politics in the United States than those critics allow, while at the same time the system’s apologists normally misrepresent just how much naked conflict underpins it. In countering these and other misconceptions of the distinctiveness of America’s democracy, and especially with respect to its proneness to continual conflict, four main themes are developed in chapters 2–5. Each of the themes is outlined in turn before the Introduction resumes with an explanation of how they are linked to each other in the three remaining chapters of the book.

How American Society Has Been Divided

The first theme is that, historically, American society was divided on different lines than were those other societies that would later become democratic. Typically, at the heart of the latter lay divisions relating to social class; consequently,

a major part of politics was about class. While class politics would develop in the United States, it did so in the context of two older sources of social division.¹⁸ Just as one contemporary landscape looks different from another if it contains long-eroded and extinct volcanoes, so American politics today has been molded by two old features, neither of which is class. Nor did these social cleavages have counterparts in Europe, Latin America, or Australasia. The American cleavages are not merely *dissimilar* to those found elsewhere, their very nature also contributed directly to the intensity of conflict evident in American politics throughout its history.

One line of division arose from there being two fundamentally divergent bases to the American economy in different parts of the country—a system using wholly free labor and the other largely dependent on slave labor. Even when slavery was abolished, it left a major legacy in the form of racial politics.¹⁹ While race has become a line of cleavage in many democracies in recent decades, its role in American politics has been exceptional because it derived from, and continued, an older source of social conflict. Contemporary race relations may well be much better in the United States than in many other countries, but that is not the point: slavery and then race shaped how other lines of social division came to be understood by voters and to be managed by politicians. For example, use of the word “welfare” in American political debate draws covert attention to a racial dimension because many white Americans believe (incorrectly) that most people who receive welfare payments are not white.²⁰ In Europe similar debates have much more of a class focus, with those receiving such payments being identified by others as working class.²¹ In a sense, it is true to say that race is ever present in American politics even when race itself is not directly at issue.

The other source of fundamental division has its origins in religion, but in America this takes a very different form than in other democratic regimes.²² The distinctive American version derives from the aftermath of the de-Christianization of commercial societies during the eighteenth century. In that era ideas of a universe without a God, associated with the Enlightenment, had spread among social elites in Europe and North America. Subsequently, in the United States their influence then went into decline. Protestant revivalism proved to be far more successful in America than elsewhere in the nineteenth century. While only 10 percent of Americans were church members in the 1770s, membership grew rapidly in the years before the Civil War, and at the end of the twentieth century 60 percent of the population were still members.²³ The result was not just a society in which religious belief was widespread, but one in which there developed divisions between those who were driven to impose some aspects of their beliefs on their fellow citizens, if they could do so, and those who rejected any such imposition. Intermittently, from that time to the present, the social agenda of the former has pitched them into conflict with other religious groups and with secular Americans. At issue have been attempts by the former to prevent all Americans from engaging in various activities—whether it be drinking (in the nineteenth century) or having abortions or facilitating stem cell research (in the late twentieth century). The high level of religious observance in the United States

has helped give consistently greater prominence in political debate to issues that elsewhere were, or became, secondary political disputes.

One crucial consequence of all this was that social divisions that were central to European politics, and that were also present in the United States, were interpreted in radically different ways by America's politicians and citizens than by Europeans. Most notably how, and in what circumstances, social class could become a political issue in America was transformed by the context in which it emerged there.²⁴ Although, as will be argued in chapter 2, class has long been a significant cause of division within American society, its impact on politics was inevitably shaped and modified by the two older social conflicts (the legitimate sources of labor for the economy and also religion). In particular, the labor/race interface in America meant that many class-based disputes would be subsumed partly under race. Thus, for example, a matter that in Europe would have heightened class tensions in America could be transformed into an issue relating to racial divisions. Furthermore, the two main lines of social division in America were ones not easily resolvable by compromise and negotiation. For all the intensity that the class struggle could generate during the era of industrialization, in the long term class came down to disputes over the distribution of social resources that were negotiable. Negotiations became easier as total national wealth rose. Various forms of social redistribution brought about social peace, even if the terms were vigorously contested at particular times and everyone would have wanted a greater share for themselves. The primary lines of social division in America involved demands that were essentially incompatible with each other. This meant that it was more difficult to reach "reasonable compromises" acceptable to all on a permanent basis. That much that has been at the center of American politics is less "divisible" than are material goods has made the negotiating of conflict harder.²⁵

In addition, American protagonists have often seen their opponents as making illegitimate demands of government in pursuit of their goals. Those goals were not just mistaken or wrong but were beyond the legal and moral scope of constitutional government. For example, white southerners who defended racial segregation believed that those who were trying to change federal laws to eliminate it were making wholly improper interventions in the political system.

Incompatible Political Ideologies

A second theme is that there are two especially important, and potentially conflicting, political traditions in America that can give rise to different prescriptions as to what is required, and what is permitted, from government. While there is an obvious link between these traditions and the social conflicts just described, it is not a direct one: the two traditions are best considered separately from the two social cleavages. The incompatibility of the traditions, to which political theorists usually refer as liberalism and republicanism, can itself generate bitter divisions among Americans. Although both liberalism and republicanism were influential in the developments of values and principles elsewhere, the juxtaposition of them

in the United States has produced a distinctive set of competing demands on the political system. Far from being a country in which there were no rival political ideologies, as is sometimes asserted, the United States is one in which conflicts between different political principles remain intense in the twenty-first century.

Originating in the birth of the republic, appeals to these two quite separate, but widely accepted, sorts of ideas were made in justifying policies and the means deployed to enact them. These two traditions then continued to generate rather different kinds of ideologies and political principles that could, and often did, come into opposition with each other. This point may seem highly contentious. After all, many commentators have argued that America has been united behind a liberal ideology since the country's founding.²⁶ Some have seen it as "a country organized around an ideology" that "embraces a set of dogmas about the nature of the good society."²⁷ In support of this claim many have pointed to the absence of ideological battles between liberals and conservatives, at least in the sense that those concepts were understood until the New Deal.²⁸ Nor was there a battle between either of them and socialism, or indeed between any other "isms" found elsewhere. Instead, it is claimed, most Americans accept beliefs that might perhaps be described as "Americanism." However, as Rogers Smith has demonstrated so clearly there is not a single American political tradition. Throughout its history there have been many traditions competing against each other; ideological conflict was always at the heart of American politics.²⁹ Most especially there is not, and never has been, a single set of beliefs about the nature of the good society that most Americans accept. Americans have disagreed fundamentally about that society. Unlike Smith's account, though, the argument outlined in this book emphasizes two particular political traditions (liberalism and republicanism) as having been especially important in America in producing rival ideas about legitimate political and governmental action. Great care must be taken, though, in deploying the two terms, "liberal" and "republican"; liberalism as a long-standing set of political ideas has little to do with the agenda of "liberalism" in contemporary America, while republicanism must not be confused with any particular ideas actually advanced by the Republican Party or its supporters.

How, then, do liberalism and republicanism differ? The liberal regards the individual, and what the individual wants, as a fundamental political value. As David Miller observes, mainstream liberals "characteristically defend their political positions by invoking an individualist view of the self," seeing the "individual as a freely choosing agent, and society as a set of arrangements designed or evolved to permit such individuals to pursue their ends."³⁰ Liberals differ among themselves on the role the state should have in facilitating this. At one extreme are those who argue for a minimal state, because they see governments as inevitably being an obstacle to individuals in their attempts to do what they want. The state should provide for common defense and a legal framework for resolving disputes between individuals, but that should be the limit of its activity. At the other extreme are those who believe that there are certain kinds of wants that individuals may have that can be provided only on a collective basis and in some instances that means by the state. For these types of liberals, central coordination

is necessary for the provision of some goods and services. However, common to all liberals is the insistence that, whatever these goods and services are, they must be ones actually wanted by the people. They cannot be provided on the basis that they would be good for anyone, individually or collectively, in the absence of evidence that they are wanted. Nor can their supply by the state be justified by evidence that they would want them after they had been supplied, even if they do not want them now. Between the two extreme positions there are, of course, a variety of other liberal stances.

In contrast with liberalism, republicanism places the political community, and not the individual, at the center of political life. The republic is a community of free individuals, who are free because they are members of that republic, and it is the freedom of the community that needs to be protected. Only through doing that can the freedom of the individual citizen be protected. For republicanism, “it is important for democratic politics that all perspectives should be represented in the political arena, but in reaching policy decisions, citizens should set aside their personal commitments and affiliations and try to assess competing proposals in terms of shared standards of justice and common interest.”³¹ Republicanism is compatible with a wide variety of different arguments as to how extensive state activity should be. When there is full agreement as to what the community consists of—who is a member, what its shared values and lifestyles are, and so on—republicanism shares an important objective with liberalism. For both the only justification for state action is that it will provide benefits or advantages to the people. However, there are two key differences between liberalism and republicanism. Liberalism does not regard the community as having interests of its own separable from those of the individuals in it. Moreover, before sanctioning state action a liberal (of the nonminimalist kind, of course) would require evidence that the objective promoted by that action was indeed *wanted* by individuals. For a republican that action could be justified merely by demonstrating that it would be for the *good* of the community, even if people do not want it now. Obviously, “it is essential to republican politics that every significant political standpoint is represented in the political arena,” but ultimately the quality of republican democracy rests on the outcomes being for the good of the community. It does not depend on there being some kind of “fit” between what each citizen wants now and the policy enacted.³² That “fit” is an essentially liberal notion. Of course, in a republic the people (as voters) can still express their disapproval in voting out those leaders who misjudge where the good of the community happens to lie; republicanism is not authoritarian, therefore. However, it provides for a less direct link than does liberalism between the will of the people and what the state should do.

However, there is an even greater divergence between liberalism and republicanism that arises in relation to the composition of the community’s citizenry or the nature of its core values. Because liberalism is concerned with individuals there can be little disagreement as to who the members of a state are; they are those people living within its borders. As individuals, they have interests that they have a right to protect within the confines of the state. For a liberal,