III. The Intellectuals and the Flag

To tell the truth, September 11, 2001, jammed my mental circuits, and I spent much of the ensuing year trying to get them unjammed, first of all, and, second, trying to make sense of both the jolts and the jamming and to learn from them. This was as much an intellectual as an emotional undertaking. Resisting what is called "closure," I did not shy from bewilderment, from unprecedented feelings and thoughts, whole shelves stocked with cans of worms. I did not try to dispel my immediate feelings, horror and astonishment, because feelings can be links to reality, even if sometimes they throw you for a loop. Through my emotions I found myself in contact with—thinking about—questioning—and taken by—patriotism, and rethinking what intellectuals are good for and where they have let us down.

Proximity was not the cause. It wasn't that I and my family were in danger directly—we lived a mile north of the ruins of the Twin Towers, a sizable distance, as these things go, though close enough to see and hear the second explosion. A day and a night later, and for weeks to come, we were breathing the World Trade Center, the tons of acrid smoke, the vaporized remnants of thousands of computers, copy machines, phones, glass and steel, carpets and desks, asbestos, God knows what—corpses, too, though it took time to realize that. But the fumes of catastrophe don't make you rethink your principles. Fear—fear that this one-time event might not turn out to be a one-time event—fear

comes closer to accomplishing that. But fear was only one feeling and there were others, surprising ones. Love, for example.

Thinking about that crystalline, desperate morning forever enshrined (and trivialized) by two numbers, I have tried to hold on to the astonishment and deepen it with reflection, not to flee from the shock. Experience that astonishes is not the sole truth but it is an indispensable truth—the truth of "wild history," in the historian Richard Slotkin's phrase, history that did not have to happen but that, once having happened, changes not only the future but the history that happened before.

My memories are of strangers and their losses but no less of solidarities. I think of a distraught young woman, red-haired, staggering up the sidewalk from the direction of the vanished Twin Towers, a continuous cascade of tears flowing down her face. I think of the handbills posted everywhere in lower Manhattan, the photos of the missing, *Have you seen —?* the desperate pleas to call this or that phone number, the candles burning on the sidewalks next to the fire stations, the hand-printed signs: Thank You to Our Heroic Fire Fighters. I recall a homeless woman on the subway declaring her sympathy for my wife, whose home, after all, was a mile from the rubble. Strangers wished each other good luck. It's not too much to say that I, and they, felt love for each other—love of a people who would endure. I think of mourners and mutual aid, in other words, not of the dead themselves. I also think of an open mike in Union Square where people started debating the U.S. response, people who disagreed vehemently but were willing to hear each other out.

I did not, as they say, "lose anyone." But I hope it does not sound either callous or self-congratulatory to say that in those awful days I *found* people—and a people to whom I belonged. The afternoon of September 14, my wife and I walked down to the perimeter of the ruins along the West Side of lower Manhattan and fell in with a crowd that was greeting and applauding rescue workers—police, fire fighters, phone and gas company people, ironworkers and welders, most driving slowly northward out of the smoking Ground Zero area as other trucks drove south, heading in. Some came trudging out of the zone, their boots caked in gray ash. Some people came around handing out pictures of loved, lost ones.

Out of the zone of ruins walked a man and woman in their early thirties, handsome, clear-eyed, wearing yellow slickers and boots. They were trying to figure out how to get to the subway. We advised on directions and fell in with them. Mary and Dean had driven down from Syracuse, 250 miles away, to volunteer and had just spent thirty-six hours in the belt of destruction, digging in rubble, dispersing whenever horns sounded to signal that buildings were in danger of collapse. They'd been directing themselves, more or less. Now the federal managers were coming in to take over.

They said it hadn't been easy to get into the damage zone: in fact, they'd had to trick their way in. They had reported to the main volunteer depot at the Javits Convention Center a mile and a half north. Mary, an image consultant at a cosmetic company, had some therapeutic experience and wanted to work with children. They found three hundred people lined up in front of them. So they attached themselves to an upstate fire company, got their yellow slickers, boots, and smoke-protection masks, and made their way to Ground Zero. They didn't know George W. Bush had made his appearance that afternoon (or that he'd been given a far less vigorous reception than Mayor Giuliani), nor were they impressed. At the time they'd been catching a couple of hours' sleep. Soaked by the first rain in days, they'd gone first to the shell of a nearby hotel, but there was a stench, and somebody walked up and told them not to sleep near the bodies.

I asked Dean what he thought the United States ought to do now. "We have to do something," he said, "but it's not easy. We have to be careful about retaliating. We need diplomatic pressure. We can't go bomb a lot of innocent people. *Then we've done what they've done*." That same week I was also struck by a third-generation New Jersey flag shop owner, Gary Potervone, who was interviewed on ABC. He said that he sold twenty-seven thousand flags in a single day, adding: "It's not like the Gulf War. That was, 'Get 'em, get 'em.' This is more solidarity. I'm very happy to see true patriotism. This is so much warmth."

I loved these strangers, and others I met in those days, and didn't feel mawkish about it—these new, less aggressive New Yorkers, speaking in hushed voices, or so it seemed, lining up

to give blood at the local hospitals, disappointed that no one was collecting any; the cabbies driving in unaccustomed silence, all the gratuitous horns shut down for a change; New Yorkers without their carapaces. I took inspiration from the patriotic activists who seem to have brought down Flight 93 over Pennsylvania and saved the White House or the Capitol. They hadn't waited for authorities to define their patriotism for them. They were not satisfied with symbolic displays. It dawned on me that patriotism was the sum of such acts.

The night of September 11, in search of clarity and shoring up, I reread George Orwell's 1945 essay, "Notes on Nationalism," wherein Orwell distinguishes between the English patriotism that he affirms in the name of the values of the left and the bombastic nationalism that is the cowbird substitute. "By patriotism," he wrote, "I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. . . . Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power." Orwell leaves some difficult questions in abeyance: Can you be patriotic if you don't think the place and the way of life you are devoted to are the best in the world? Can you think some aspects (democracy and human rights) are most definitely worth spreading—even at times by force, come to that, though not cavalierly—and others most definitely are not? I'll come back to these difficulties later, but the important thing is that they complicated the devotional feeling that I had but didn't erase it.

A few days later my wife and I decided to hang an American flag from our terrace. It was a straightforward household decision—hardly a decision at all, because neither of us nor either of my stepsons felt like debating it. There was no controversy and we didn't consult anyone. The flag was a plain affirmation of membership. We did not put it up to claim that the United States of America deserved to rule, or war on, anyone else. (As it happened, we supported the use of force against al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, though with plenty of worries about terrible consequences that might ensue, but the worries were neither here nor there.) A few days later Clyde Haberman, a metropoli-

tan columnist of the *New York Times,* called to ask me about the efflorescence of the American flag all over the city. I told him that we had put up a flag, that we had never thought that we would undertake such a display, that it was not meant as support for the policies of George W. Bush but as an affirmation of fellowship with an injured and resolute people. Our private fact was briefly transformed into a news item, featured in Haberman's column of September 19, whereupon a lot of friendly mail came my way, and some not so friendly: some tut-tuts, some insults.

Why this fervent debate? Why did left-wingers of my generation get into arguments with their children, who wanted to fly flags from their windows? Why should many intellectuals have seen the flag as a betrayal? What was it betraying?

For many in the cosmopolitan class, middle to upper middle in income, college educated and beyond, university and culture-industry based, patriotism lost its allure decades ago. This is in large part a story of the "Vietnam generation," but we will also have to look further to comprehend the problem.

To understand why patriotism has been tainted, it will help to consider the opposite concepts against which patriotism is counterposed, for they suggest what people think they are turning toward when they turn away from patriotism. One contrary is individualism, the other, cosmopolitanism.

First of all, patriotism gets in the way of individualism. For patriotism affirms that we are bounded, attached, unfree. It places value on a certain conformity. Nietzsche associated patriotism with the herd instinct. We pride ourselves on being individuals, after all. This is an article of faith, our modern gift, glory, and burden. We are self-created (or trying to be). However and wherever we were born, with whatever roots and equipment, into whatever class, race, religion, region, or nationality, we insist that we remain free to choose the essentials of our lives, that our freedom is inalienable, that whoever tampers with it is our enemy. Choice is our mantra. As women and men with reproductive rights, we declare ourselves pro-choice. As voters, believers, advocates, consumers, we are nothing if not free—or so U.S. intellectuals are inclined to believe, even if, paradoxically, we simultaneously believe that human beings are shaped by society. Even as reli-

gious souls, Americans like to imagine that they are born-again, affirming a choice to *accept* Jesus Christ, something they can do or refrain from doing, something that wasn't preordained by the rites to which their parents subjected them.

But patriotism decrees that we are not free. We are obliged. Patriotism is sticky. It is imperious about its imperatives. It values a certain unfreedom, for it declares that in a crucial way we are not free to choose the condition we were born into. Unless we are naturalized citizens, we did not choose our obligation. We are free to imagine our country any way we like, but we are not free to deny that it *is* our country. In fact, patriotism in the United States is an especially compelling and demanding sort of patriotism, because the nation is founded on an idea, not on blood. The idea is an apparent paradox—that we are most ourselves when we affirm our roots, that we are free now because we are bound by the American past. What we are loyal to is the condition of our freedom, and yet when we are loyal, we have renounced our freedom.

All this is to say that if you believe that you are free and that it is important to be free, patriotism, to the degree that it claims your loyalty, is unnerving. The more insistent the claim, the more unnerving it is. One way to ward off the claim is with cosmopolitanism, which by one definition in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* means a belief that one is "so sophisticated as to be at home in all parts of the world." From a cosmopolitan point of view cosmopolitanism embraces the cosmos, patriotism the parish—it is parochial. The cosmopolitan impulse is to declare that patriotism is for other people—people mired in false consciousness and bad taste, vulnerable to propaganda, bluster, and sentimentality. The nation is what they have—or fancy they have—when they don't have much else.

Cosmopolitanism is not only a belief but an experience. It rests on sociological realities—inexpensive travel, comfort with multiple languages, a thick mesh of contact with people of other nations who affiliate by professional and political interest. The world that cosmopolitans inhabit is not confined to national boundaries. Cosmopolitans also note that, in the argument of the neatly titled book by the political anthropologist Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* nations are not natural, organic,

objective, or anything of that sort but are the inventions—"constructions"—of intellectuals and the stories that they tell about history and culture. (In the more vernacular rendition a nation is an entity possessed of an army, a navy, and a dictionary.) Nations, being constructed, are artificial, not natural, malleable, not fixed. Patriotism therefore loses its primordial aura.

For a large bloc of Americans my age and younger, too young to remember World War II—the generation for whom "the war" meant Vietnam and perhaps always will, to the end of our days—a powerful experience underlay the case against patriotism, as powerful an eruption of our feelings as the experience of patriotism is supposed to be for patriots. Indeed, it could be said that in the course of our political history we lived through a very odd turnabout: the most powerful public emotion in our lives was *rejecting* patriotism.

The United States is a nation that invites anxiety about what it means to belong, because the national boundary is ideological, hence disputable and porous. Part of what it has meant to be American has been to hold views about what it means to be American. As the first constitutional republic the United States has been not just a homeland but a land of ideas, of American*ism*. When Abraham Lincoln declared, "I have never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence,"[1] he was affirming what the radical political theorist John H. Schaar, in a bold essay of 1973, called "covenanted patriotism"[2]—as opposed to the blood-and-soil variety. But under stress the covenant is prone to wear thin. Civic patriotism, which demands self-rule, collapses under the follow-the-leader principle. Under strain authoritarians conclude that questioning authority is an unaffordable luxury. Citizens of the democratic American republic are told that by expounding the wrong ideas, they have forfeited their membership. They are prone, in other words, to be accused of un-Americanism.

Astoundingly, the sixties upended this accusation and turned it into a mass movement of pride. From membership and anger combined came a tradition of antitraditionalism. During most of the sixties, and frequently since, I have groped for words to express, in the right proportions, the membership and the anger

at once—the anger deriving from the membership, of course, the membership an intimate fact, making it easy to feel that the nation, by acting contrary to justice, violates its very right to exist. The feeling was: if humanity was betrayed by those who purported to be its saviors, there was no one to rectify the wrong but those of us who understood how deep the betrayal went.

For me the anger predated the Vietnam War. I launched into activism as a campaigner against Washington's nuclear weapons stance in 1960 and only deepened my estrangement from national policies under the pressure of the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, U.S. collusion in South African apartheid, and, deepest of all, the egregious war in Indochina. But for some reason one particular moment in March 1965 stands out. I was twenty-two, living among the SDS circle in Ann Arbor, Michigan, helping organize the first national demonstration against the Vietnam War. The war was already a daily assault on brains and conscience, and so I could scarcely bear to watch the television news. But one evening I turned on the NBC News and saw pictures of U.S. Marines occupying Santo Domingo while young Dominicans protested. It was, on the scale of enormities, only a tiny exercise in old-fashioned imperialism, this expedition into the Caribbean to shore up a military regime blocking the restoration of an elected social-democratic government that it had deposed. There was no napalm, no white phosphorus, no strategic hamlets. I don't know why these particular pictures of young Dominicans resisting the Americans stirred me so deeply, but I know I identified with them. I don't know what I felt more keenly: horrified disbelief that my country could be waving the wrong flag, betraying its better self, or horrified belief that my country could be doing something so appalling only because it—not its policies, not this or that wretched decision, but it in the core of its dark heart—was committed to suppressing the rights of inconvenient peoples. Gunboat diplomacy, we learned to call this, in high school history. How do you reform a leviathan?

I remember writing a poem that night—not a good one but a sincere one. I was a nonviolent twenty-two-year-old and I wanted to stand with the young anti-Americans in the Dominican Republic: the poem ended with a romantic line about "a rifle and a

sad song." Another phrase I like better sticks out in my memory: "I would only curse America, like a drunkard his bottle." America, love it and leave it at once. A nice trick, though it may put a kink in your lower back.

I have felt such moments of horrified recognition countless times since and devoted many waking hours to fighting against imperious American foreign and military policies. I am not speaking solely of my ideas here but of passions. In the second half of the sixties and early seventies, I was choking on the Vietnam War. It felt to me that the fight against the war had become my life. The war went on so long and so destructively, it felt like more than the consequence of a wrongheaded policy. My country must have been revealing some deep core of wrongness by going on, and on, with an indefensible horror. I was implicated because the terrible war was wrapped in my flag—or what had been my flag. Then why persist? Why not surrender title, and good riddance? The American flag did not feel like my flag, even though I could recognize—in the abstract—that it made sense for others to wave it in the antiwar cause.

I was a tactician. I could argue—I did argue—against waving the North Vietnamese flag or burning the Stars and Stripes. But the hatred of a bad war, in what was evidently a pattern of bad wars—though none so bad as Vietnam—turned us inside out. It inflamed our hearts. You can hate your country in such a way that the hatred becomes fundamental. A hatred so clear and intense came to feel like a cleansing flame. By the late sixties this is what became of much of the New Left. Those of us who met with Vietnamese and Cuban Communists in those years were always being told that we had to learn to love our people. In my case it was a Communist medical student in Havana who delivered the message in the waning days of 1967. Love our people! How were we supposed to do that, another New Leftist and I argued back, when our people had committed genocide against the Indians, when the national history was enmeshed in slavery, when this experience of historic original sin ran deeper than any class solidarity, when it was what it meant to *be* American? Lessons in patriotism taught by Communists—a definitive New Left experience drawn from the comedy of the late sixties. Well, we would try.

We would go looking for historical lessons, for one thing. Our historians, proudly revisionist, went looking for "history from the bottom up"—heroic sailors during the American Revolution, slaves in revolt, Native American fighters, union organizers, jailed World War I socialists, Wobblies. But the United States of Richard Nixon was not conducive to our invention of *this* tradition. The American flag did not feel any more congenial as Nixon widened the Vietnam War into Laos and Cambodia and connived in the Pinochet coup; or in the eighties, as Reagan embraced the Nicaraguan contras, the Salvadoran and Guatemalan death squads. To put it mildly, my generation of the New Left—a generation that swelled as the war ground on—relinquished any title to patriotism without much sense of loss because it felt to us that the perpetrators of unjust war had run off with the patrium. Economists of the left were busy proving the necessity of imperialism and the military-industry complex; sociologists were busy proving the iron grip of the power elite; philosophers, the accommodationist bias of pragmatism; historians of science and technology, the usurpation of knowledge by corporate and government monoliths.

If intellectual honesty stopped you from papering over the darkness of U.S. history, then what? After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Surely, the nation had congealed into an empire whose logic was unwarranted power. What was the idea of Manifest Destiny, the onward march westward, if not a robust defense of righteous empire? What was the one-time California senator S.I. Hayakawa's brag about the Panama Canal—"we stole it fair and square"—if not a sly recognition of the truth? America was indebted to slavery for much of its prosperity; the United States lorded it over Latin America (and other occasional properties, like the Philippines) to guarantee cheap resources and otherwise line American pockets; American-led corporations (among others) and financial agencies systematically overlooked or, worse, damaged the freedoms of others. Add that the United States, accounting for less than 5 percent of world population, burns about one-quarter of the world's nonrenewable, climate-melting fossil-fuel energy. If all this lording over did not rise to the level of colonialism in the strict sense, and if it could be acknowledged

that empires might have some benign consequences, still, U.S. wealth, resource access, military power, and unilateralism qualified as imperial reach.

From the late New Left point of view, then, patriotism meant obscuring the whole grisly truth of the United States. It couldn't help spilling over into what Orwell thought was the harsh, dangerous, and distinct phenomenon of nationalism, with its aggressive edge and its implication of superiority. Scrub up patriotism as you will, and nationalism, as Schaar put it, remained "patriotism's bloody brother."[3] Was Orwell's distinction not, in the end, a distinction without a difference? Didn't his patriotism, while refusing aggressiveness, still insist that the nation he affirmed was "the best in the world"? What if there was more than one feature of the American way of life that you did *not* believe to be "the best in the world"—the national bravado, the overreach of the marketplace. Patriotism might well be the door through which you marched with the rest of the conformists to the beat of the national anthem.

Facing these realities, all the left could do was criticize empire and, on the positive side, unearth and cultivate righteous traditions. The much-mocked "political correctness" of the next academic generations was a consolation prize. We might have lost politics but we won a lot of the textbooks.

The tragedy of the left is that, having achieved an unprecedented victory in helping stop an appalling war, it then proceeded to commit suicide. The left helped force the United States out of Vietnam, where the country had no constructive work to do—either for Vietnam or for itself—but did so at the cost of disconnecting itself from the nation. Most U.S. intellectuals substituted the pleasures of condemnation for the pursuit of improvement. The orthodoxy was that "the system" precluded reform—never mind that the antiwar movement had already demonstrated that reform *was* possible. Human rights, feminism, environmentalism—these worldwide initiatives, American in their inception, flowing not from the American Establishment but from our own American movements, were noises off, not center stage. They were outsider tastes, the stuff of protest, not national features, the real stuff. Thus when, in the nineties, the Clinton administra-

tion finally mobilized armed force in behalf of Bosnia and then Kosovo against Milosevic's genocidal Serbia, the hard left only could smell imperial motives, maintaining that democratic, anti-genocidal intentions added up to a paper-thin mask.

In short, if the United States seemed fundamentally trapped in militarist imperialism, its opposition was trapped in the mirror-image opposite. By the seventies the outsider stance had become second nature. Even those who had entered the sixties in diapers came to maturity thinking patriotism a threat or a bad joke. But anti-Americanism was, and remains, a mood and a metaphysics more than a politics. It cannot help but see practical politics as an illusion, entangled as it is and must be with a system fatally flawed by original sin. Viewing the ongoing politics of the Americans as contemptibly shallow and compromised, the demonological attitude naturally rules out patriotic attachment to those very Americans. Marooned (often self-marooned) on university campuses, exiled in left-wing media and other cultural outposts—all told, an archipelago of bitterness—what sealed itself off in the postsixties decades was what Richard Rorty has called "a spectatorial, disgusted, mocking Left rather than a Left which dreams of achieving our country."[4]

From this left-fundamentalist point of view, America was condemned to the attacks of September 11, 2001, by history—a history made in large part by the United States itself. Didn't the United States aid, inflame, and otherwise pump up a host of Islamist fundamentalists—overtly in Afghanistan, to fight the Russians; and effectively (if inadvertently) in Iran, with its long-running alliance with the shah, thereby fueling the Khomeini revolution; and moreover in support of the Saudi ruling family? The ashes of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were proof that the furies were avenging, chickens were flying home, American detonations were blowing back. A second argument was appended, based on a principle of responsibility sometimes stated in moral, other times in practical, terms: that dissenters should exert leverage where they stand the greatest chance of proving effective. Even if the hands-on perpetrators were al Qaeda operatives, American dissidents could not conceivably influence the Islamists directly; the only possible leverage was on the U.S. government.

Indeed, the United States does not have clean hands. We are living in tragedy, not melodrama. Recognizing the complex chains of cause and effect that produce a catastrophe is defensible, indeed necessary—up to a point. If only history could be restarted at one pivotal juncture or another! That would be excellent. But the past is what it is, and the killers are who they are. Moral responsibility can never be denied the ones who pull the triggers, wield the knives, push the buttons. And now that fanatical Islamists are at work in real time, whatever causes spurred them, the question remains: what should the United States do about thousands of actual and potential present-day killers who set no limits to what and whom they would destroy? The question is stark and unblinkable. When a cause produces effects and the effects are lethal, the effects have to be stopped—the citizens have a right to expect that of their government. To say, as did many who opposed an invasion of Afghanistan, that the terror attacks should be considered crimes, not acts of war, yet without proposing an effective means of punishing and preventing such crimes, is useless—and tantamount to washing one's hands of the matter. But for taking security seriously in the here and now, and thinking about how to defeat the jihadists, the fundamentalist left had little time, little interest, little hard-headed curiosity—as little as the all-or-nothing theology that justified war against any "evildoers" decreed to be such by the forces of good.

So two Manichaeisms squared off. Both were faith based, inclined to be impervious toward evidence, and tilted toward moral absolutism. One proceeded from the premise that U.S. power was always benign, the other from the premise that it was always pernicious. One justified empire—if not necessarily by that name—on the ground that the alternatives were worse; the other saw empire every time the United States wielded power.

But these two polar tendencies are not the only options. There is, at least embryonically, a patriotic left that stands, as Michael Tomasky has put it, "between Cheney and Chomsky."[5] It disputes U.S. policies, strategies, and tactics—vociferously. But it criticizes from the inside out, without discarding the hope, if not of redemption, at least of improvement. It looks to its intellectuals for, among other things, scrutiny of the conflicts among

the powers, the chinks in the armor, the embryonic and waning forces, paradoxes of unintended consequences, the sense immured in the nonsense, and vice versa. It believes in security—the nation's physical security as much as its economic security. It does not consider security to be somebody else's business. When it deplores conditions that are deplorable, it makes it plain, in substance and tone, that the critic shares membership with the criticized. It acknowledges—and wrestles with—the dualities of America: the liberty and arrogance twinned, the bullying and tolerance, myopia and energy, standardization and variety, ignorance and inventiveness, the awful dark heart of darkness and the self-reforming zeal. It does not labor under the illusion that the world would be benign but for U.S. power or that capitalism is uniformly the most damaging economic system ever. It lives inside, with an indignation born of family feeling. Its anger is intimate.

Patriotism is almost always affirmed too easily. The ease devalues the real thing and disguises its weakness. The folklore of patriotism lends itself to symbolic displays wherein we show one another how patriotic we are without exerting ourselves. We sing songs, pledge allegiance, wave flags, display lapel pins, mount bumper stickers, attend (or tune in) memorial rites. We think we become patriotic by declaring that we are patriotic. This is activity but of a desiccated sort. It is striking how many of these touchstones we have now—how rituals of devotion are folded into ball games and concerts, how flags adorn the most commonplace of private activities. Their prevalence permits foreign observers to comment on how patriotic the simple-minded Americans are. But such displays are not so straightforwardly proofs of patriotism at all. They are at least equally substitutes. Schaar's stricture is apt here: patriotism "is more than a frame of mind. It is also activity guided by and directed toward the mission established in the founding covenant."[6] Patriotic activity starts with a sense of responsibility but does not discharge it with tributary rites of celebration and memory. Patriotism in this sense, genuine patriotism, is not enacted strictly by being expressed in symbolic fashion. It is with effort and sacrifice, not pride or praise, that citizens honor the democratic covenant.

To put it this way is to erect an exalted standard. Yet to speak of the burdens of patriotism points to something not so flattering about the patriotism that Americans so strenuously claim. Perhaps Americans celebrate patriotism so energetically at least in part because, when we get past the breast beating, our actual patriotic experience is thin on the ground. Perhaps Americans feel the need to tout Americanism and rout un-Americans precisely for this reason—not because we are such good patriots but for the opposite reason. In the United States we are not much for substantial patriotic activity. Ferreting out violations is the lazy person's substitute for a democratic life. If civic patriotism requires activity, not just symbolic display, Americans are not so patriotic after all.

The work of civic engagement is the living out of the democratic commitment to govern ourselves. Actual patriotic experience in a democracy is more demanding—far more so—than the profession of sentiments; it is more easily advertised than lived up to. Democratic patriotism is also far more demanding than signifying loyalty to the regime. In a kingdom the patriot swears loyalty to the monarch. In a totalitarian society the patriot is obedient in a thousand ways—participating in mass rituals, informing on enemies, joining designated organizations, doing whatever the anointed leader requires. But democratic loyalty is something else, stringent in its own way. If the nation to which we adhere is a community of mutual aid, a mesh of social connections, then it takes work, engagement, time. It is likely to take money. It may take life. It is a matter, to borrow a phrase of 1776, of pledging "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor." It may well require that we curb our individual freedoms—the indulgences that normally we count as the highest of values.

In a word, lived patriotism entails sacrifice. The citizen puts aside private affairs in order to build up relationships with other citizens, with whom we come to share unanticipated events, risks, and outcomes. These citizenly relationships are not ones we choose. To the contrary. When we serve on a jury or in Teach for America or ride in the subway, we do not choose our company. The community we partake of—like the whole of society—is a community of people whom we did not choose. (Thus the embar-

rassment to the individualistic ideal of self-creation.) The crucial difference here is between a community, consisting of people crucially *un*like ourselves, and a network, or "lifestyle enclave," made up of people *like* ourselves.[7] Many "communities" in the sense commonly overused today—"the business community," "the academic community"—are actually networks, a fact that the term disguises. Cosmopolitanism is also usually lived out as a network extension: it invites connections with people (usually professionals) like ourselves who happen to live in other countries.

Undemocratic societies require sacrifice, too, but unequally. There, what passes as patriotism is obeisance to the ruling elite. Democracy, on the other hand, demands a particular sort of sacrifice: citizenly participation in self-government. This is not the place to explore the difficult questions of where participation must stop and professional management must start. But the important principle is that the domain of popular involvement should be as large "as possible," the question of possibility itself deserving to be a contentious one. At the very least, at the local level the citizens should approve the agenda for governmental action. The result is twofold: not only policy that takes distinct points of view into account but a citizenry that takes pride in its identity as such. When the citizen enters the town meeting, the local assembly, or the jury, disparate qualifications hardly disappear, but they are tempered, counterbalanced by a common commitment to leave no voice unattended.

Decision making aside, democratic life also requires spheres of experience where citizens encounter each other with equal dignity. Put it another way: A democratic culture is one in which no one is exempted from common duties. Commonality and sacrifice are combined. This is the strong side of what has become known as communitarianism, which has also been called civic liberalism. As Mickey Kaus argued in *The End of Equality,* social equality requires bolstering three spheres: the armed forces and national service; public schools; and adult public domains (transportation, health, day care, public financing of elections). The operative word, of course, is *public*. It is in these sectors that the Republic's commonality lives, on the ground, in time and space. In the armed forces life is risked in common. In national

service time is jointly invested in benefits that do not accrue to self-interest. When loopholes are closed, class mixing becomes integral to life. Privilege, however useful throughout the rest of life, can't buy you everything. In public schools privilege doesn't buy superior opportunities. In amenities like public transportation, governments provide what private interests would not, and individuals experience themselves as sharing a common condition. If public spheres dwindle, sheer wealth and income grow in importance.[8]

We also need some common sacrifice of our self-indulgences—not to test our Puritan mettle but to prevent ecological breakdown. Having proven averse to eco-efficiency in production, consumption, and transportation, despite our robust achievements in global warming and air and water pollution, we have a particular responsibility to lean less heavily on the earth. Since oil dependency is a considerable factor behind some of the most egregious U.S. foreign policies, true patriotism is fully compatible with, indeed intertwined with, ecological sanity that reduces fossil-fuel guzzling and promotes sustainable sources like solar and wind power. Yet Detroit automakers steadfastly resist hybrid gas-electric cars and increased fuel efficiency, and Washington permits them to get away with their profligacy. Patriots ought to endorse the environmentalist Bill McKibben's suggestion that "gas-sucking SUVs . . . should by all rights come with their own little Saudi flags to fly from the hood."[9]

Overall, egalitarian culture is patriotism's armature. No matter how many commemorations Americans organize, no matter how many pledges we recite and anthems we stand for, the gestures are inessential. At times they build morale—most usefully when the suffering is fresh—but they do not repair or defend the country. For that, the quality of social relations is decisive. And the contrary follows, too: the more hierarchical and less equal the nation becomes, the less patriotic is its life. Not that the culture as a whole should be in the business of enforcing egalitarian norms—the ideal that populism defended and Stalinism made murderous. But there must be zones of social life, important ones, where the same social goods are at stake for everyone and individual distinction does not buy exemption.

The most demanding, of course, is the military—and it is here, where the stakes are highest and the precedents most grievous, that universality is most important. It must not be possible to buy substitutes, as the wealthy on both sides did in the Civil War. Many are the inequalities that are either morally legitimate or politically unbudgeable, but there must be equalities of sacrifice and encounter—not in order to strip the high and mighty of their individuality but purely and simply to treat everyone equally. Financial sacrifice on the part of the privileged is a proof that money cannot buy anything—it may not even be able to buy the most important thing, namely, personal safety. As long as equality prevails in one central zone of life—the most dangerous zone—the inequality of rewards in other zones does not become the be-all and the end-all of existence.

Many liberals demur. For whatever its merits conscription surely grates upon the ideal of self-control—that is precisely one of its purposes. Let's face it: most of us don't like to be told what to do. Moral preachments not only grate, they offend our sense that the only authority worth taking seriously is the authority of our own souls (or senses). Moral preachments about our duty sound to many Americans, left, right, and center, like claxons of a police state. To live our patriotism we would have to pick and choose, to overcome—selectively—some of the automatic revulsion we feel about laying aside some of our freedoms in the name of a higher duty. To be honest, it isn't clear to me how much of my own initiative *I* would gladly surrender for the common good. But "gladly" is not the point.

The principle of universal conscription is not only an abstract tribute to equality—worthy as that would be—but it undermines cavalier warfare. If the citizens asked to support a war are the ones who will have to fight it (or their relatives are), the hypocrisy factor weakens—the fervent endorsement of war in Iraq, for example, by Republican leaders whose children will not serve and who, for that matter, thought the Vietnam War a "noble crusade" (Ronald Reagan's term) though somehow in their own persons somehow never found time for it. The principle that wars must be popular with their soldiers is a good democratic requirement. Let it not be forgotten that Richard Nixon terminated the draft

not to end the war—in fact, he continued the war from the air, killing at a pace that exceeded Lyndon Johnson's—but to insulate it from public exposure and dissent.

Other practical difficulties stand in the way of a draft. The principle of universality clashes with the limited need for troops. The military needs high-end recruits: what happens to universality, then? Should the brass be forced to make work for less-qualified conscripts? Should there be a universal draft for national service, with most draftees assigned to nonmilitary duties? Should there be some sort of lottery component? Legitimate questions not to be settled here. But the principle of *some* universal service should be the starting point.

Equal sacrifice of liberty in behalf of conscription ought to dovetail with equal civic opportunity of other sorts. We talk a lot about equality of opportunity, but as a nation we are ill prepared to amplify the principle—to enlarge it to the right to be healthy, to be cared for, to participate in government. As the elections of 2000 and 2004 demonstrated, we are not even terribly serious about guaranteeing the right to vote—and have one's vote counted. In a formula: Lived patriotism requires social equality. It is in the actual relations of citizens, not symbolic displays, that civic patriotism thrives. In these palpable relations no one is elevated. Status does not count, nor wealth, nor poverty. One person, one vote. Absent these ideals in action, patriotism lapses into gestures—Pledges of Allegiance, not the allegiance itself.

But after September 11, 2001, acts of allegiance were precisely what George W. Bush did not inspire. Leave policy questions aside. A unifying logic links many of his public statements on and after September 11. There is the inadvertently comic spectacle of this man, who spent much of *his* September 11 flying around the country as his staff fabricated security threats, soon thereafter appearing on a television commercial urging people to get back on planes and visit Disney World. In July 2002, pooh-poohing the significance of corporate corruption, and therefore the need for political remedies, he resorted to these words: "I believe people have taken a step back and asked, 'What's important in life?' You know, the bottom line and this corporate America stuff, is that important? Or is serving your neighbor, loving your neighbor

like you'd like to be loved yourself?"[10] No contradiction here: the mediocre oilman with the triumphal career expressed the logic of a business civilization—consumption *as* citizenship, political withdrawal as a noble act. His not-so-comic equivalent was urging Congress to stick with tax-cut legislation whose benefits would flow disproportionately to the rich who needed it least.

During World War II children collected scrap metal to link their fate to the country they loved. Air raid wardens did their part. So, of course, did soldiers, sailors, and war workers. So did those who accepted their rations without resorting to the black market. Yet in a drastic break from precedent, Bush proposed to cut taxes (especially for the better-off) in wartime, promoting "bombs and caviar," in the words of the *Los Angeles Times*'s Ronald Brownstein, and guaranteeing "bigger federal deficits and a larger national debt," thus shifting the burden onto our children. "With this push to slash taxes during wartime," Brownstein wrote, "Bush broke from 140 years of history under presidents of both parties."[11]

Forget Afghanistan: after September 11, 2001, millions of Americans wanted to enlist in nation building *at home*. They wanted to fight the horror, to take their fate in their hands, to make community palpable. They wanted to rescue, save, rebuild, restore, recover, rise up, go on. From their governments nothing much materialized by way of work for them, for the principal version of patriotism on offer today demands little by way of duty or deliberation, much by way of bravado. What duty might ignite if it were mobilized now, we do not know. How Americans might have responded if their political leadership had invited them to join in a Marshall Plan that would, among other things, contain anti-Americanism and weaken the prospects of jihadist terror, we do not know. How they would have responded if told that it was now a matter of urgent self-defense as well as environmental sanity to free the United States from oil dependency, we do not know. These invitations were not issued. After some days of mutual aid, patriotism dwindled into symbolism. It was inert, unmobilized—at most, potential. In the current state of conspicuous symbolic patriotism, Election Day is all the politics that most citizens can manage, and for most of them that single

day is not the culmination of their political activity, it is the sum of their political activity.

Take it as symbolic, then, that September 11, 2001, was, among other things, New York City's primary election day for Democratic mayoral candidates. The primary was the least missed loss of that day. Terrorists smashed up our political life, as well as our economic and personal lives. Our professionals, our public institutions, and our volunteers roared into action. Our police, our fire fighters, our ironworkers, our emergency workers threw themselves into action in a style that deserves to be called noble. A mayor previously unmarked by eloquence responded eloquently. Take it as symbolic that our official politics, and our loss of them, didn't seem to matter much. Politics didn't live. Citizens of the United States did, rising to the occasion, sustaining one another through mutual aid

A few weeks after September 11, my wife and I took the flag down from our terrace. The lived patriotism of mutual aid was in retreat around us and the symbolic substitute felt stale. Leaving the flag up was too easy. Worse: with the passage of weeks, the hardening of U.S. foreign policy and the Democratic cave-in produced a good deal more triumphalism than I could stomach. The living patriotism of the activist passengers of Flight 93 slipped into the background. Deep patriotism, patriotic activity, did not bounce back. Americans were watching more news for a while, even more foreign news, but the needed political debates about means and ends were not happening. Democrats were fearful of looking unpatriotic—in other words, patriotism was functioning as a silencer.

We needed defense, absolutely—lurking in the background was the formidable question as to why we had not had it on September 11, 2001—but what *was* a "war on terror" that was, in effect and in principle, interminable? It would be declared won (as Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld declared soon after the attacks) when and only when Americans *felt* safe. What kind of war was

that, whose outcome depended on a popular mood? What did the administration's pre–September 11 obsession, missile defense, and its reckless demolition of such treaties as Kyoto and antiballistic-missile defense have to do with it? Was there not the disconcerting fact that five or six individuals, most of them plutocrats without a legitimate claim to democratic rule, were calling all the important shots? By the time George W. Bush declared war without end against an "axis of evil" (that no other nation on Earth was willing to recognize as such)—indeed, against whomever the president might determine we were at war against, just when he said so—and declared further the unproblematic virtue of preemptive attacks, and made it clear that the United States regarded itself as a one-nation tribunal of "regime change," I felt again the old anger and shame at being attached to a nation—*my* nation—ruled by runaway bullies, indifferent to principle, playing fast and loose with the truth, their lives manifesting supreme loyalty to private (though government-slathered) interests yet quick to lecture dissenters about the merits of patriotism.

As I write, almost all the goodwill tendered to the United States after September 11, 2001, has vanished. U.S. foreign policy arouses contempt and fear almost everywhere. Most of the world has good reason to believe that truculence and arrogance are the hallmarks of Bush's foreign policy—that they are the heart of his foreign policy. Noting how shabby, sloppy, and evasive were Bush's arguments for a U.S.-British war on Saddam Hussein's Iraq, most other nations concluded that Bush seized upon the September 11 attacks as a warrant for pursuing a generally belligerent approach to the world, not least in his confrontation with Saddam Hussein and the disingenuous arguments Bush made for it. Leave aside for the moment the deficiencies of the other powers' approach to Saddam Hussein. Leave aside, too, the virtues of overthrowing his vile regime, and consider the political-psychological fallout of Bush's aggressive war program. With his ferocious logic—"Either you're with us or you're with the terrorists"—Bush isolated the United States but achieved, domestically, a forced marriage. For a while U.S. politics collapsed into his arms. Perhaps inevitably, U.S. politics and public opinion were seized by—panicked into—war fever. Vengeance and aggression fused and overcame niceties of logic

and evidence, with which Bush trifled little or not at all. His inner circle deluded itself and deluded the citizens. As the botched invasion of Iraq showed, self-delusion is his inside group's second nature and lying is their third, or the other way round—the exact relation between the two would tax Henry James.

With dispatch and without much care for diplomacy, Bush and his entourage codified their belligerence into a doctrine of preventive war (misleadingly called "preemptive") enshrined in the unilateralist National Security Strategy issued under his name in September 2002. Rhetorically fortified against the "axis of evil," Bush exploited the momentum of counterterrorism to ready war with Iraq. The trauma of the massacres led many Democrats and independents, as well as nearly all Republicans and most of the press, to embrace his policies in the name of the wounded nation. The embrace persisted. Politics ceased. The Patriot Act was rushed through. Civil liberties were abridged with barely a protest. In the shadow of September 11 most Democrats were not only cowed but convinced that they were morally bound to be cowed—though there were noble, cogent dissents from Al Gore, Senator Ted Kennedy, and Senator Robert Byrd.

As the United States hastened toward an indefinite war footing, the Democrats froze. Mainly, during the midterm election campaign of 2002 and the run-up to the Iraq War, leading Democrats ceded foreign and security concerns to Bush and urged voters to focus on economic disgruntlement. Deferring to Bush's claim to be the authentic voice of security, they refused to condemn his weak counterterrorism record before September 11, his spotty record in financing the nuts and bolts of defense afterward, or the injurious consequences of his unilateralism for the multinational cooperation that counterterrorism requires. When Georgia Republicans linked the incumbent Democratic senator and Vietnam War triple amputee Max Cleland with Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein in a vile television commercial, the Democrats didn't fight back resoundingly with a how-dare-you. They gave Bush a free hand.

So Bush abused presidential power and rode roughshod over obstacles. To what degree he bewitched himself and to what degree he knowingly bamboozled the public is a nice question.

How much the members of his entourage were lying, how much deceiving themselves, how much cherry-picking the evidence, how much covering up the counterevidence and the complications and the duty of thinking through consequences, how much they were playing the bully's game of triumph of the will—sifting through all the evidence would require a book of its own. But the pattern of blunders and falsehoods is clear. Whatever the proportions that fed their misconduct, they were seized by fantasies of imminent danger and easy occupation, whereupon they lowballed the requisite number of troops, thus bungling the restoration of order in Iraq, ushering in the depredations of looters, and inviting general mayhem. The smug, faith-based ineptitude of the Bush camp recruited more terrorists wordwide and equipped them with new bases in Iraq. By outraging allies, Bush's inner circle squandered trust and endangered the United States. These were the rotten fruits of bad statesmanship.

To put the matter concisely: Bush's White House years put the United States through a time of failing empire and failing democracy both, the big question being, which would fail first? A close question.

Along with some decent outcomes, even the most well meaning of empires bulks up hubris and delusion, which in turn bulk up the machinery of bravado and wishfulness that substitute for reason in a government of runaway power. In the down-to-earth world the dreams of the empire builders rest on fantasy. They must be delusional, because the very real world is recalcitrant. Extraordinary as this may appear to the small minded, people everywhere live in worlds of their own, with their own designs, beliefs, institutions, sins, and prejudices. They will not gladly suffer through occupation even when the occupation overlaps with liberation from tyranny, which in the case of Iraq—don't forget—it did.

George W. Bush's notorious inability to explain himself cogently, as if blunt repetition were an adequate substitute for argument, was more than an idiosyncrasy. It spoke for the miserable standards that prevail throughout a degenerating democracy—but let me hasten to add, a degenerating democracy with a chance of restoring itself to life. The problem was not just that Bush catered to his base of apocalyptic Christians and antitax fanatics

but that tens of millions of them were pining for him—and a supine media bent over backward to give him the benefit of the doubt. So did failing democracy go to work for doomed empire.

The point deserves repeating: first in 2000 and then again in 2004, the country had no objection to bullying—that has to be faced. First, almost half of American voters chose this lazy ne'er-do-well, this duty-shirking know-nothing who deceived and hustled his way to power largely without careful scrutiny. It's hardly irrelevant that the Bush pack bulled their way to power partly on the strength of their ignorance. The character of the president is not irrelevant—it takes the measure of our corrupted democracy. His career was nothing if not a protracted exercise in getting away with overreach. The life lesson he learned from broken democracy is that you could drink yourself into one stupor after another, for decades, cover up holes in your c.v., lose piles of other people's money in bad oil investments, and still hustle up more of other people's money for a better investment (in baseball), which you use as a launch to the governorship, then raise piles more money to run for president, and as long as you started with the right genetic stuff, you could come out on top. Then, you and your entourage, including your brother, his staff, and a Supreme Court chosen during your party's long stays in power, stop the Florida recount—and what do you know, you're in power without the nuisance of having to be elected. You could easily feel anointed. A career that culminates in a bloodless coup d'etat gives a man a sense that he can get away with anything he sets his mind to.

What this way of life and governance had to do with democracy was very little. What it had to do with a combination of demagoguery, trickery, and muscle was very much. And so Bush found himself in charge and ready to rip. The words *September 11* were all the argument he needed to fire up for war. The hellish smoke of lower Manhattan would be answered by facts on the ground in Iraq. By the campaign of 2004 Bush had put enough of those facts on the ground to smother doubts about the Iraq War in a conviction that he must be reelected to safeguard the nation against terror attacks that had nothing to do with Iraq. That he accomplished.

Empire in a semi-democracy requires more than the mobilization of fear: it requires delusion about how necessary and easy

empire is. For empire dampens intelligence. It offers recruitment points for the legions who would commit more massacres out of their own sacred delusions. In the phrase deservedly made famous by the late senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, empire "defines deviancy down"—not a charge that the neoconservatives who used to like it leveled at the Abu Ghraib torturers and their colleagues at other prisons in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Empire corrupts public debate with demagoguery from every side.

Empire tends to make the winners complacent, belligerent, stupid, ignorant, and myopic. Harboring the fantasy that the United States represents only values and not power, empire is unwilling to face the responsibilities of power, including good judgment in behalf of those whom empire claims to help.

Empires fade. Inevitably, they grow smug, bite off too much, inspire too much resentment, collide with too many enemies too strategically placed. In an age of weapons of mass destruction, where enemies are not strictly of Dick Cheney's or John Ashcroft's or Alberto Gonzales's invention, the collisions are obviously more dangerous than ever before.

Smugness goes with myopia. For half a century purported realists in Washington thought nothing of greasing the palms of Middle East tribal chiefs so that they would grant the favor of selling their oil. Oil makes the United States grovel before Saudi tyrants, who funded the Taliban and Wahhabi madrassas throughout the world. Oil lubricated the disastrous U.S. support for the brutal shah of Iran—another gift to Islamic fundamentalism, as it turned out. Oil floated the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. Access to Saudi and Gulf oil looks like a triumph of empire but easily could now be its undoing—not to mention the way the United States tied itself to Central Asian dictatorships to gain new oil sources, and underwrote counterguerrilla military action in Colombia to protect an oil pipeline.

So empire makes the United States myopic and takes its revenge on democracy. Ignorance comes to look like innocence—or, in the current jargon, "optimism." Isn't this the pathos of empire—that, even in the face of murderous attacks, it should go on protesting its innocence, blinking at an infuriated world, and protesting that it can bulldoze its way through reality?

During the Bush years intellectuals have had their work cut out for them exposing the arrogance of empire, piercing its rationalizations, identifying its betrayal of patriotic traditions. But all that said, serious questions remained about what intellectuals of the left *wanted*: What *was* to be done about fighting the jihadists and improving democracy's chances? What roles made sense for the United States, the United Nations, NATO, or anyone else? What was required of governments, nongovernmental organizations, foundations, and private initiatives? Given that the Iraq War had been ill advised, what should be done next about Iraq and Iraqis? About such questions many intellectuals of the left were understandably perplexed—and sometimes evasive. Foreign policy wasn't "their problem." Their mode was critical and back-glancing, not constructive and prospective. It was useful to raise questions about the purposes of U.S. bases abroad, for example. It was satisfying, but not especially useful, to think that the questions answered themselves. So the intellectuals' evasion damaged what might have been their contribution to the larger debate that the country needed—and still needs—on its place in the world and how it protects itself.

Liberal patriots would refuse to be satisfied with knee-jerk answers but would join the hard questions as members of a society do—members who criticize in behalf of a community of mutual aid, not marginal scoffers who have painted themselves into a corner. Liberal patriots would not be satisfied to reply to consensus truculence with rejectionist truculence. They would not take pride in their marginality. They would consider what they could do for our natural allies, democrats abroad. They would take it as their obligation to illuminate a transformed world in which al Qaeda and its allies are not misinterpreted as the current reincarnations of the eternal spirit of anti-imperialism. They would retain curiosity and resist that hardening of the categories that is a form of self-protection against the unprecedented.

Even the unprecedented has a history. What happened on September 11, 2001, could have happened only under the appalling spell of a titanic failure of intelligence, or rather, many intersecting failures: the government's failure to know facts; its failure to absorb facts, to "connect the dots"; not least, in the background, a

whole society's failure (including the government's but not limited to the government's) to grasp the dynamics of Islamism and defend against its murderous threat.

War was declared on Americans, and in such circumstances "know your enemy" is an imperative not to be neglected. Like any citizen whose knowledge is circumscribed—that is to say, like virtually every American—I wanted guidance in understanding the global Islamist movement and opposing it well. So after September 11, I turned to a range of experts, their scholarship and debates. Even now, I cannot say that my knowledge is deep, but after reading around I feel justified in concluding that, while scholars of Islamism disagree about many things, they agree that it is a force in its own right, not the West's shadow or doppelgänger, not a "construction" of American xenophobes—a force. However deeply, stupidly, self-defeatingly U.S. policy might have inflamed ferocious anti-Western passions in Iran, in Afghanistan, in Egypt, in Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere, still and all, al Qaeda and its allies exist as a world force, a lethal and unremitting movement that a U.S. community of mutual aid must resist—intelligently. And must defeat—definitively. U.S. foreign policy has trampled democratic values and realistic limits along the way, but denouncing these blunders, while probably useful for avoiding repetitions—at least if the hectoring gets through to some of the powerful—is not enough.

Intellectuals must question, certainly. They must question the powers that be—but why stop with the powers? Mustn't we question the counterpowers as well, in hopes of helping them think more clearly? Mustn't we ask of the fundamentalist left, predisposed to think that any American use of force serves imperial interests and that military withdrawal from far-flung bases is automatically the route to safety, whether these assumptions are logical? Are all military deployments equally wrong (or right)? The discussion must be more pragmatic than pointing the finger at evildoers—anti-Americans *or* Americans. Combating global terrorists is a genuine national interest and also a global one but how to combat them *wisely?* Like Paul Berman, who published a polemic, *Terror and Liberalism,* in 2003, I concluded that Islamism, or political Islam, is a poisonous, nihilist, totalitarian

creed allied, in its ideological DNA, to fascism and communism. Unlike him, I concluded that its roots are principally non-Western and that the wrong interventions—as against Iraq's Ba'athist tyranny—are likely to backfire.

We are entitled to a sharp debate on the right means of defense, which would hinge, in important part, on understanding the obvious: that all policies have consequences—consequences that need to be hard-headedly assessed. Polemics against evildoers will not do. Neither will neoconservative declarations that all nations that the president designates as members of an axis of evil are equally worth attacking. But the fundamentalist left is almost as empty as the neoconservative belligerents. In the eyes of such figures as Noam Chomsky and the late Edward Said, an American use of force always amounts to one thing and one thing only: the Empire is Striking Back. In their eyes Bill Clinton's interventions in behalf of the rights of Bosnian and Kosovar Muslims were as wicked as any and all other interventions. It follows that there is no interesting divide in U.S. motives or strategies and therefore nothing to choose in U.S. politics. Politically, therefore, the fundamentalist left is not only morally and strategically mistaken, it is hopeless: it cannot possibly outorganize the powers that be, for they are all of a piece. Viewing U.S. power as an indivisible evil, the fundamentalist left has logically foregone the possibility of any effective opposition beforehand.

The fundamentalist left, in other words, is misguided and unhelpful in a distinctive way: it negates politics in favor of theology. It wheels away from the necessary debates about where to go from here. It takes refuge in the margins, displaying its clean hands, and recuses itself. The authoritarians who charge dissenters with treason are paranoid and guilty of bad faith, but the dissenters who concede security to the authoritarians have surrendered the chance of defeating them.

More than three years after September 11, 2001, I'm still within reach of the emotions that welled up then—pain at the losses, fury at the enemies of humanity who hijacked the jets and would cheerfully commit more mass murders, impatience with their apologists. But these reactions are knotted together with anger at the smugness of most of Bush's responses, a passionate revul-

sion at his reckless foreign policy and in particular his clueless Iraq War, however beneficial some of its consequences.

What follows now for intellectuals? Dissent, for one thing—vigorous, thoughtful, difficult, indispensable. Dissent against the grain, including the grain of the prevailing dissent. Refusing to take conventional wisdom for granted is, after all, the intellectual's calling. The critical spirit at its highest is the same as the scientist's: careful scrutiny of the reigning hypotheses, refusal to bend to authorities or antiauthorities without good reason, skepticism about premises—even the opposition's. But we also need a firm foundation for oppositional politics: a clear vision of values; a convincing analysis of national strengths and failings; a steady, accessible source of ideas about how a country that has lost its bearings can find them. We need, in short, heirs to David Riesman, C. Wright Mills, and Irving Howe.

Patriotism has no quarrel with robust dissent. To the contrary: slack-jawed acquiescence to the authorities, however reverent, however bombastic, is the spirit of defeat—a travesty of patriotic resolve. Patriotism is not obedience. It does not march in lockstep. It is not Ari Fleischer's appalling declaration that Americans should "watch what we say." It is not former attorney general John Ashcroft's admonition: "To those who scare peace-loving people with phantoms of lost liberty, my message is this: Your tactics only aid terrorists for they erode our national unity and diminish our resolve." Obedience is obedience, and there are good times for it—heeding the fire marshals in a crowded theater, for example. But the fact that obedience can be passed off as patriotism in the United States today suggests the poor condition of actual patriotism.

Liberal patriotism would stand a decent chance of rousing dormant political energies—some has already been ignited by George Bush's recklessness and incompetence. Despite the Bush administration's bullying belligerent tactics, most of the U.S.

public still cares about acting abroad through alliances and with the sanction of the United Nations. It is skeptical of go-it-alone adventures. Months of government propaganda, obsequious journalism, and opposition surrender were required to turn public opinion toward unilateral war in Iraq. Not only Democrats but independents and some Republicans ought to find liberal patriotism congenial, though some will bridle at the "liberal" label. On the domestic front little love is now lost for the corporate chiefs, those of gargantuan appetite for whom this administration so loyally fronted until it was shocked—shocked!—to discover there was gambling going on in the casino. With the bursting of the stock market bubble, deregulation à la Enron and cronyism à la Halliburton no longer look like economic cure-alls. Whom do Americans admire now, whom do we trust? Americans did not take much reminding that when skyscrapers were on fire, they needed fire fighters and police officers, not Enron hustlers or Arthur Andersen accountants. Yet we confront an administration that gaily passes out tax largesse to the plutocracy, whose idea of sacrifice is that somebody in a blue collar should perform it for low wages.

Surely, many Americans are primed for a patriotism of action, not pledges or SUVs festooned with American flags. The era that began on September 11, 2001, would be a superb time to crack the jingoists' claim to a monopoly of patriotic virtue. Instead of letting minions of corporate power run away with the flag (while dashing offshore, gobbling oil, and banking their tax credits), intellectuals need to help remake the tools of our public life—our schools, social services, transport, and, not least, security. We need to remember that the exemplary patriots are the members of the emergency community of mutual aid who fought to bring down Flight 93, not the born-again war devotees who cherish martial virtues but were always at pains to get themselves deferred from the armed forces.

Post-Vietnam liberals have an opening now, freed of our sixties flag anxiety and our automatic rejection of the use of force. To live out a democratic pride, not a slavish surrogate, we badly need liberal patriotism, robust and uncowed. For patriotic sentiment, that mysterious (and therefore both necessary and dangerous)

attachment to the nation, moves only in one of two directions: backward, toward chauvinistic bluster and popular silence, or forward, to popular energy and democratic renewal. Patriotism, as always, remains to be lived.

It is time for the patriotism of mutual aid, not just symbolic displays, not catechisms or self-congratulation. It is time to diminish the gap between the nation we love and the justice we also love. It is time for the real America to stand up.

Notes

1. Lincoln, quoted in John H. Schaar, "The Case for Patriotism," *American Review* 17 (1973): 70.
2. Schaar, "The Case for Patriotism," p. 68.
3. Ibid., p. 59.
4. Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 35.
5. Michael Tomasky, "Between Cheney and Chomsky," in George Packer, ed., *The Fight Is for Democracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), pp. 21–48.
6. Schaar, "The Case for Patriotism," p. 72.
7. Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 72, uses the term *lifestyle enclave*. The commonplace use of *network* came later.
8. Kaus argued in his 1992 book that liberals are mistaken to overemphasize economic inequality, and I do not follow him all the way to his bitter end. Surely, the appalling inequalities in the ratio between CEO and worker salaries, for example, of the order of 500 to 1, do not serve the entrepreneurial purposes that laissez-faire advocates rejoice in. That it would take confiscatory tax rates to eliminate this discrepancy does not mean that lesser reductions are pointless. Reducing the high-low income gap would work toward the principle of social equality.
9. Bill McKibben, "It's Easy Being Green," *Mother Jones,* July–August 2002, p. 36.

10. Judy Keen, "Bush Trying to Ride Out Corporate Flap," *USA Today,* July 12, 2002, p. 4A.
11. Ronald Brownstein, "Bush Breaks with 140 Years of History in Plan for Wartime Tax Cut," *Los Angeles Times,* January 13, 2003.