American Political Cultures

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〈Contents〉

Like a nation's physical setting and resources, its social customs and ideals can influence the character and operation of its governmental system. To take account of this shaping force, political scientists have developed the concept of political culture. In its most general and useful sense, *political culture refers to politically relevant ideas and social practices.* It is a concept that calls attenion to the fact that habits of action, norms of good and evil, and even basic notions about the nature of God and man can influence the ways people behave in political contexts and the ways in which they evaluate the political behavior of others. To be sure, not all social arrangements and not all prevalent ideas are politically important, but many are.

Even something as basic as language may play a significant role. One noted political philosopher has speculated that the existence of the word "leader" has increased the chances for the success of democratic government in English-speaking nations over such countries as Germany and Italy, where the closest words are more equivalent to "commander" or "director"(Sartori, 1965:97). One would expect a society in which fathers

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usually exercise authoritarian control over family life to foster very different sorts of political relationships from a society in which there is considerable give and take in family decision making. One would also expect people who grow up under a social or religious system that stresses conformity and minimizes individual rights to behave differently from those reared in a system that emphasizes the individual person as the primary unit of society.

There is evidence to indicate that to a large extent the expected relations between society and politics do take place. People accustomed to participate in decision making in the family, at school, or at work tend to participate more in political life and to feel more competent to influence governmental decisions. The connections, however, between social background and political behavior are neither simple nor universal. Among other important factors is personality. For instance, people who feel least competent politically are usually not those who have been denied opportunities to participate in other social situations, but those who have had such opportunities but did not take advantage of them.

Moreover, traffic between politics and other social relations is not along a one-way street. New governmental policies frequently interact with old social customs to precipitate fundamental changes. And these changes occur not only in the way people behave politically but also in relationships within supposedly more basic groups like the family or the church.

"Our government," U. S. Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis once noted, "is the potent, the omnipresent teacher. For good or ill, it teaches the whole people by its example." American concepts of equality owe much to Jefferson and Lincoln. George Washington and Chief Justice John Marshall helped shape our views on nationalism. Certainly Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson were primarily responsible for converting minority views about the desirability of the welfare state into an accepted part of American

life. Chief Justice Earl Warren's pronouncement for the Supreme Court in the school segregation cases in 1954 changed a great deal of thinking about human dignity in general and race relations in particular.

More generally, it is a plausible hypothesis that much of the permissiveness of current American life is a by-product of political democracy. Extolling the virtues of debate and popular participation in governmental affairs has a perceptible spillover into the arenas of the family, classroom, office, and church.

1. Physical Setting

Culture, of course, operates in a physical setting, and in this respect the United states has been abundantly blessed. When the country won its independence in 1783 it was underpopulated and militarily weak. In some respects it was also small. Although the colonies claimed large territories, in fact they controlled only a narrow strip along the Atlantic seaboard. That ocean, however, and the limited technology of sailing ships made the United States remote from the great powers of Europe. To the north, Canada was a sparsely settled outpost of the British empire; to the south, Mexico, once it had gained its own independence from Spain, wanted only peaceful coexistence. To the west was an almost uninhabited subcontinent separated from the Asian powers by an even vaster ocean.

A Land of Plenty

Physical isolation was enhanced by natural wealth. The climate was generlly temperate, rainfall abundant, and the thick black soil both virgin and fertile. A series of rivers provided a network of inland trade routes, and the seacoast was indented with sheltered harbors. Scattered about the country was an abundance of resources—wild animals for food, hides, and furs; grassy plains for cattle; timber for houses; gold and silver for adventure and quick wealth; and, for the industry that would come later, coal, oil, natural gas, iron, copper, lead, and bauxite.

In 1840, Alexis de Tocqueville, a Frenchman who traveled widely in the young nation, could speak of the "magnificent dwelling place" and the "immense booty" that fortune had left to Americans. That abundance has played a critical psychological as well as physical role in the American experience. Great prosperity, and an illusion of even greater prosperity, attracted wave after wave of immigrants and sent them as well as older inhabitants searching out and developing the natural wealth of the country. Often these people came as the downtrodden—political or religious refugees from western or central Europe, starving peasants from Ireland or Italy, or hungry coolies from China and Japan. They came, however, to better themselves, not to shift the scene of their poverty. Until the early twentieth century, even their raw muscle power was much in demand. The myth of rags to riches may have seldom materialized, but social and economic advancement were possible and became the American dream, creating a surge of energy and hope.

Immigration and social mobility combined to help Americans maintain a myth of equality. It was not that all people were equal—they certainly were not equal in wealth, education, talent, or political power. But the pull of an expanding economy and the push of the next sweep of immigrants, who represented both producers and consumers, did give most of the white-skinned poor more and more material benefits. It was not so much that their proportionate share of the good things of life increased, but that the number of good things available at a low price multiplied.

Demography

One of the features about the United States that most immediately strikes a foreign visitor is the diversity of its population. We speak of some of the more politically important ethnic groups later in this paper. Here we underline only a few obvious points.

When the first Europeans arrived in the late sixteenth and early

seventeenth centuries, the entire subcontinent was inhabited by only a few hundred thousand Indians. The initial settlers were almost all white Christians of various Protestant sects from northwestern Europe; but, in the South, wealthier planters soon were importing black slaves from Africa. Then, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, waves of Catholic immigrants arrived, first from Ireland, then from Italy, Poland, and central Europe. They were joined by European Jews in the eastern part of the United States and in the west by Chinese and Japanese.

As the frontier moved westward in the mid-nineteenth century as the United States took over Texas, California, and what are now New Mexico and Arizona, the country also acquired a significant Hispanic (Spanish-speaking) minority, one that has been swelled, especially in recent years, by continued migration—some of it illegal—from Mexico and the rest of Latin America.

Restrictive legislation in the 1920s slowed all forms of immigration, but the end of World War II brought a new wave of refugees from Europe; Castro's take-over of Cuba caused a surge of refugees from his tyranny; and Communist oppression after the war in Vietnam created a similar influx of refugees from Indochina. And, as already indicated, there has been a constant trickle of illegal immigration, most of it from South and Central America and the Caribbean.

Each of these people has brought its own culture and had its own effects on the country, though that effect has seldom been immediate—or welcome. Indeed, the lot of first generation immigrants, whether from Europe or other continents, has typically been harsh. They have been subjected to social and economic discrimination and often to mistreatment by the very governmental officals who have sworn to uphold the Constitution's guarantee of equality under law.

Industrialization

Until 1900, the western frontier played a major roles in Amercan development both as a source of wealth and as a psychological escape valve. Industrialization served only the first function and, of course, it has survived, while the frontier has vanished. Before 1860 its impact had been gradual. The Civil War (1861-65) created massive demands and started American industry off on a spiraling curve that has continued, despite frequent recessions and occasional depressions, for more than a century.

European demands during World War I further bolstered American industry, so that by 1918 the United States had become not only the creditor of much of the world but also the biggest of the industrial nations. After the disastrous years of the Great Depression (1929-39), World War II catapulted the Amerian economy off once more with a momentum that sustained rapid economic growth for forty years. During this period, industrial production increased nearly threefold, employment grew by 53 percent, and average incomes (adjusted for inflation) doubled.

The industries that spurred rapid growth—steel, farm machinery, automobiles, machine tools, appliances—no longer are the driving force of the American economy. Computers and other high technology industries now are the most dynamic sectors of the economy. While thousands of steel, auto, and other blue collars were seeing their jobs disappear, employment in the computer industry doubled between 1970 and 1982. Another key development has been the expansion of service jobs, which account for a steadily growing share of the increase in employment in recent years. In 1982 McDonald's hamburger stands, with a workforce of 350,000, employed two and one-half times as many people as U. S. steel.

Urbanization

Industrialization greatly altered the distribution of the American popu-

lation. The new factories and their demands for labor stopped immigrants at the cities and also sparked a steady exodus from the farms to metropolitan areas. In 1800, only 6 percent of Americans were living in towns with population over 2,500; by 1870 the proportion had risen to one quarter. By 1900 it was up to 40 percent, and by 1980 more than three out of four people in the United States were living in urban areas.

But even these figures underestimate the physical reach of urbanization. The arms of Megalopolis have been spreading out like the tentacles of a hungry octopus, scooping up surrounding land for industrial parks, research laboratories, shopping centers, and suburban housing developments. "Strip cities," like the one reaching 600 miles from the north of Boston to south of Richmond, Virginia, are turning huge stretches of country into urbanized belts that make old geographical and political boundaries impractical for dealing with many social problems.

The growth of cities is a consequence of what have been called "two revolutions," one piled on top of the other. The first of these revolutions is the rise of an urban way of life. The second is its diffusion and dispersal over the countryside. Underlying the "first revolution" has been migration to the city, primarily in response to industrialization.

The "second revolution," the rapid outward movement of urban populations, has resulted from acceleration of the natural tendency of cities to grow at their edges. Rapid outward expansion was made possible primarily by mass production of automobiles. Since 1920, suburban areas have been growing increasingly faster than central cities. By 1980, more than 100 million Americans, about 45 percent of the total population, lived in suburbs.

As people and jobs have moved outward, most older cities have stagnated. All of the major cities in the northeast and midwest have lost population during the past three decades. In all of these cases, losses in population would have been far greater had the outward movement of white families not been offset by the growing migration of blacks

and "Latinos" to the city—most of them poor and uneducated. Between 1950 and 1980, millions of blacks moved to central cities, which raised their proportion of black residents from 12 percent to 23 percent. Since the 1970s, Spanish-speaking migrants substantially outnumbered black newcomers. As a consequence of these trends, and despite the fact that many blacks and Hispanics have also moved to the suburbs, most central cities are separated from the surrounding suburbs by substantial racial, ethnic, income, housing, and educational differences.

Exceptions to these patterns are found primarily among the younger cities of the south and west. Growing up in the era of the automobile, these cities developed at much lower density than had the older cities of the northeast and midwest. As a result, many urban cores in Florida, Texas, Arizona, and California are more collections of suburbs than cities in the traditional sense.

Unlike the typical older metropolis, most of the newer cities have continued to experience rapid growth. Houston, the sixth largest city in the nation, more than doubled its population between 1950 and 1980. During the same three decades even more spectacular growth rates occurred in Tampa, Jacksonville, El Paso, Phoenix, San José, Albuquerque, and Tucson.

By the 1970s, metropolitan growth began to slow as increasing numbers of Americans were attracted to life in smaller towns and rural areas. The dispersion of jobs was one factor in the rebirth of many small towns and rural areas. Even more important was the growing desire for a simpler life in smaller communities, away from the congestion, crime, pollution, and impersonality of the metropolis. Housing also is typically cheaper outside metropolitan areas, and access to outdoor recreation easier. Adding to this outflux has been the aging of the population, increasing the number of people whose residence is not tied to work, and who sought less expensive, safer, and more attractive places to live on pensions and social security checks.

A Changing Population

Industrialization and urbanization have stimulated enormous population growth. The small nation of 4 million in 1790 added 36 million residents by 1870. Then, as the impact of industrial change and urban growth began to transform American society, population expanded rapidly, both as a result of the excess of births over deaths and of immigration from abroad. In the past sixty years, the population more than doubled, reaching 226 million in 1980.

Population growth has substantially slowed. Underlying this decline have been social and family changes. Lower birth rates have combined with longer life spans to produce an increasingly older population. In 1980, one in nine Americans was 65 or older, compared with one in twenty-two in 1929 and one in thirty-five in 1870. In contrast, 65 percent of the population of the People's Republic of China is under 33.

In recent years, immigration has again become a major factor in demographic change. Over 800,000 immigrants entered the United States legally in 1980—including refugees from Cuba, Haiti, and Indochina. Another half million or more aliens are entering the country illegally each year. Altogether, these newcomers account for about one-third of the United States' annual population growth. The new immigrants are primarily from Asia and Latin America, rather than from Europe as in the past, and California rather than New York is the principal destination for the latest waves of people seeking political freedom, economic opportunity, religious tolerance, and a better life.

Another important feature of the changing demography of the United States is accelerating movement of people from the older industrial and urban heartland of the northeast and midwest to the sunbelt areas of the south and west. The rapid growth of newer cities such as Houston, Phoenix, and Tampa reflects this movement, a migration to warmer climes and economic opportunities created by industries based on petro-

Table 1.
Shifting Sources of Immigration to the United States
1959~1979

Region of Origin	Percentage of Immigrants	
	1959	1979
Europe	60.9	13.4
Latin America	19.8	38.6
Asia	8.9	41.4
Canada	8.9	3.0
Africa	1.1	2.6
Oceania	0.5	1.0

Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service

leum, electronics, and other new technologies.

2. American Society

This collage of wealth, work, isolation, immigration, industrialization, and urbanization has forged a complex society full of contradictions. The contrasts of American life abound: romantic love and high divorce rates, Hollywood sex symbols and Disneyland, urban blight alongside magnificent monuments, marvelous medical research and a mania for cigarette smoking, anger at the young for dulling their minds with marijuana but apparent neutrality toward adults' use of cocaine, eminent symphony orchestras and blaring rock bands, resounding testimonials to human dignity and equality together with insidious racial and sexual discrimination.

The American people created an economy which provides most citizens with comfortable housing, good food, and excellent medical and dental care. They millions of dollars annually for recreation—color television sets, boats, second homes, golf, fishing, bowling, whiskey, and long vacations. Yet even play means hard work for Americans; they tend to consume leisure rather than enjoy it. At times it has seemed that the Protestant ethic of hard work has gone mad and created a mass rat race of people compulsively working harder and harder to win higher

salaries, more responsibility, and less enjoyment. In recent years, however, there has been a widespread reaction against this kind of existence. Many factory workers as well as semiprofessionals and professionals have rejected the regimentation imposed by the discipline of large organizations and are searching for alternative life styles oriented toward individual fulfillment.

The frenzied labor of American adults had bought for future generations the advantge of the widest dispersion of educational opportunies in the world. The median number of years of schooling for adults in the United States now exceeds twelve. A college education has become the normal expectation of most middle-class teenagers and for large numbers of working-class children as well. In 1979, over 11.5 million students were attending colleges and universities, in absolute numbers more than eleven times the size of the student population of the People's Republic of China and, in proportion to population, about fifty times as many. The high incomes earned by doctors, lawyers, and engineers give evidence of the rewards that a highly technological society bestows for advanced training.

Despite the great emphasis on education and despite the respect Americans accord academics, there is a noticeable current of anti-intellectualism in American thought. Perhaps the challenge of survival on the frontier and later of competition in the dog-eat-dog economy of the nineteenth century discouraged philosophical speculation and encouraged pragmatic approaches. Does it work? Does it make a profit? Does it allow me to get ahead? These are the typical questions Americans have asked, not: How does it fit into a broad interpretation of the cosmos? Indeed, if Americans can be said to have developed any national philosophy, it is a pragmatism that pushes aside abstract speculation and favors practical questions about actual results.

American society is permissive as well as pragmatic. With Dr. Benjamin Spock's theories of child raising the bible of the last generation

of parents, family life has become very democratic. In recent decades, many school teachers have urged children to express their own opinions rather than to regurgitate the rote recitations that used to characterize much of what we call education. The point is not that there is no discipline in the family or school, but that there is considerably less than in the American past or in the present of most other nations.

The informality of American business life, where president or owner often insists on being addressed by first name or initials, may be partly a means of softening the savagery of competition. But the usual practice of the more successful corporations has been to encourage employees, blue-collar workers as well as top officials, to exercise initiative. Even the military is becoming less authoritarian. The traditional model of the general as the "heroic soldier" who earned a reputation for blood and guts and demands instant and unswerving obedience is being superseded by a managerial model, in which the general more often persuades than commands.

Systems of Beliefs

Basic ideas about human nature, authority, religion, and the purposes of life have broad political relevance. The framers of the American Constitution, for instance, were deeply aware of the frailty of virtue. Products of Protestant Christian culture, they were influenced by the doctrine of original sin—human nature is fundamentally weak; people want to do good but are inclined toward evil and selfishness. Thus the framers found attractive a governmental scheme for checking ambition against ambition. "But what is government itself," James Madison, one of the principal authors of the Constitution, asked, "but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary."

Ideas about fundamental philosophic principles as well as beliefs directly linked to politics are more likely to be normative than descrip-

tive. That is, they are more likely to consist of notions about what should happen than descriptions of what actually happens. These ideas thus form a kind of moral screen through which people filter information and perceive and pass judgments on political reality.

One can speak in two senses of a system of beliefs. First, there is evidence that an overwhelming proportion of Americans endorse democratic political principles. Most are convinced that democracy is the best form of government, that public officials should be elected by a majority vote, and that every citizen should have an equal opportunity to participate in politics. Americans also believe that members of the minority have the right to criticize the majority's choices and to try to win a majority over on their views. The concepts of human equality and dignity would also probably receive enthusiastic endorsement.

Second, in many important respects, the political outlooks of Americans differ from those of citizens of other countries. A cross-national study conducted in the 1950s showed that, compared to British, German, Italians, and Mexicans, Americans tended to be more trusting of their fellow man, to see more good in other people, to look more often on political participation as a civic duty, to think of themselves as more influential in their national government, and, except for the British, to be more likely to expect fair and equal treatment from public officials (Almond and Verba, 1963).

This study also found that Americans were prouder of their governmental institutions, but more recent surveys show a marked drop in American trust in their political system. The Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan reported in 1964 that 62 percent of a national sample of adults had a high level of trust in the federal government. Over the next few years that figure fell steadily, and at the time of President Nixon's forced resignation in 1974 had plummetted to 25 percent. Declining trust during this period was strongly influenced by the Watergate scandal, the Vietnam war, race relations, assassination

of U.S. and foreign political leaders, and disregard of civil and human rights by intelligence agencies. Since then general trust in government has risen slightly, but not anywhere near its earlier levels. Still, widely shared affection for the basic system continues even when levels of political trust are running low. A survey by Louis Harris and Associates in 1972 indicated that 90 percent of the respondents were convinced of the basic soundness of the American system of government despite the fact that few had a great deal of confidence in Congress or the presidency.

Another indication of changing public attitudes toward government is the rise in tax evasion and the growth of a vast underground economy based on unrecorded cash transactions. The United States historically has had a very high rate of tax compliance compared with most other political systems. By 1981, however, the Internal Revenue Service was reporting that almost $100 billion in taxes were not paid, an amount three times that of 1973. And the underground economy was estimated at $500 billion in the early 1980s, and growing at twice the rate of the economy as a whole.

Cultural Diversity

We must talk of *many political cultures* when we analyze most modern nations. Patterns of child raising, educational and religious training, and economic relations vary greatly from social group to social group in America. A Chinese immigrant raised in a traditional Oriental family is very apt to have been exposed to a set of influences very different from that of a black who came to maturity in an urban ghetto or on a Mississippi cotton farm, or of a white Protestant who grew up in an affluent suburb where discipline was light. In similar fashion, we should not expect anything approaching unanimity on most political issues.

The Silent Majority

The dominant political culture in America has been shaped largely by the values of white, middle class Protestants. Its general beliefs in popular participation and election, majority rule and minority rights, and equality before the law are widely shared. But these beliefs are usually abstract rather than particular. Often they have little to do with how people view concrete public issues. To a white business executive, for example, racial equality may refer to the right of blacks to live in decent housing in the central city, not next door in a suburb, or to compete for a blue-collar job, not a managerial position. To many blacks, equality means preferential treatment to compensate for centuries of injustice. To a conservative, the right of a minority to try to persuade the majority of the error of its ways may not include the right of a communist to speak at a public meeting. To radicals, free speech may mean the right to shout down those who advocate "immoral" or "fascist" propositions.

To many middle-class Americans, political participation may mean only voting regularly and perhaps writing to a senator or calling a local official about a problem. To most other Americans, political participation means even less. On the whole, to the average citizen politics is neither a very important nor interesting part of life's circus. In 1972, two out of every five American adults denied that they cared very much in a personal way about the outcome of the presidential election. In 1980, a bare majority of Americans bothered to vote in the presidential election.

As such responses suggest, the political knowledge of most citizens is slight. Even during national campaigns, Americans are likely to have little detailed information about issues that candidates, journalists, and political scientists consider important. The typical citizen seldom engages in serious political discussion. When he or she does, it is likely to be with people who have the same opinions.

There is a cluster of private citizens, mostly from the upper and upper-middle class, who are highly informed and deeply concerned about politics. Among this group, an opinion about a specific problem tends to be a consistent piece of a more general and coherent political orientation. These people are typically well educated and sometimes have experience in practical politics. They form, however, a small minority, accounting for less than 10 percent of the adult population.

Apparently, despite lack of knowledge and lethargic participation, abstract support for the system continues to be high, as we have seen. Throughout American history, foreign observers have been struck by the reverence with which Americans view their Constitution. Politicians and political institutions rise and fall in public esteem, but the Constitution seems to persist as a symbol of virtue as much as a charter for government.

Running alongside respect for the Constitution is suspicion of governmental power. "I am not," Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1787, "a friend to a very energetic government." Something akin to that attitude can be seen in the replies to questions put by pollsters. Americans may say that they favor governmental action on problems that affect them directly—keeping railroads running or increasing social security benefits, for example. At the same time, those people are apt to respond negatively to broader questions about increasing governmental power. Although these reactions may seem to be logically contradictory, they reflect a recognition of the need for governmental action and at the same time a yearning for the independence and individualism that Jefferson treasured.

Professional Politicians

Even very interested and articulate private citizens often differ from professional politicians in the way they look at politics. The professional's world is shaped by the fact that he or she has far more political resources at his command. The professional may know less about some particular

problems than do many highly educated private citizens, but politicians know where to find expertise if needed. More important, politicians devote their working time not merely their leisure to politics. Acquiring and using political skills are the politician's life work; and success provides other resources. If an incumbent, the professional has the authority of office and the prestige it provides. If not in office, the professional politician may still have considerable influence with those who head governmental agencies.

Private citizens seldom have a sophisticated understanding of how to translate general principles of democratic government into workable political rules. For the professional, "the rules of the game" are likely to be tangible guidelines. The most basic of these is acceptance of elections as the proper means of determining who should govern. To look at the frequency of coups d'etat around the world is to appreciate that respect for the ballot box is hardly an inborn trait. Yet no American president, senator, or member of Congress has ever tried to stay in office a day beyond the term set in the Constitution. And none has yet laid claim to any of these offices would having been elected to it.

Other rules of the game include listening to constituents' complaints, permitting groups likely to be affected by changes in policy a chance to be heard before government takes action, allowing, even when in the majority, opponents a reasonable opportunity to speak, keeping one's word to officials from the opposing party as well as one's own, not looking closely into the campaign financing or tactics of colleagues unless serious abuses come to light, and respecting the constitutional prerogatives of other governmental agencies even while sharply disagreeing with their decisions. Professional politicians generally observe these rules because they know that they have to work year after year with other professionals, that they will have to run for re-election at frequent intervals, and that in their careers they may hold a variety of offices in several branches of government.

Even the amateur who gets deeply involved in politics is apt to see a different world than does a professional. The amateur typically enters the political arena with a single, immediate policy goal in mind. The professional, on the other hand, is accustomed to dealing with many issues so steadily and constantly "that few of them have the ultimate soul-saving importance for him as they do for amateurs.... Politics for (amateurs) is a means to an end, and what counts is to gain that end. To the professional, in contrast, what counts is to endure"(Frankel, 1968: 9~10).

The Poor

Patterns of behavior, belief, and expectation are greatly influenced by an individual's economic circumstances. Most striking are the differences between those who are more or less affluent and those who live in dire poverty. In 1981, 32 million Americans lived below the poverty level. (The poverty level line is defined by the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Bureau of the Census in terms of the amount of money it takes a family in a particular area to pay for minimally adequate food, shelter, and medical care. In 1982, the poverty line for a nonfarm family of four was about $8,300). Some of these people are too lazy, too undisciplined, or too oriented toward immediate gratification to cope with life in a technological society. Some simply prefer a lifestyle that cannot be measured in economic terms. The vast majority of the poor, however, are impoverished neither by choice nor by sin but because they are old, ill, uneducated or discriminated against because of race, sex, religion, or ethnic background—in sum because of circumstances over which they have no control.

Michael Harrington, whose book *The Other America* (1962) played a major role in awakening national interest in the problems of the poor, sees poverty as "a culture, an institution, a way of life." The poor have a family structure, sexual mores, and political outlooks different from

Table 2.
Poverty in America, 1981

	Percent of Poor
Age :	
Under 18	38.7
18-64	49.2
Over 64	12.1
Residence :	
In central cities	35.3
In suburbs	25.5
Outside metropolitan areas	39.2
Race :	
Whites	67.7
Blacks	28.8
Hispanics	11.7

Total Number of Poor=31, 822, 000
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

those of middle-class citizens. "To be impoverished is to be an internal alien, to grow up in a culture that is radically different from the one that dominates society." Those doomed to live in the empty shadows of poverty are vulnerable to have—of themselves as well as of others—as they catch glimpses of the world of prosperity.

Poverty also has tremendous implications—although still largely potential implications—for the structure as well as the policies of the American political system. Until the late 1960s, the poor were politically mute and unimportant, despite their numbers. More recently, poor blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Indians, and Appalachian whites have become "politically visible." Obviously, 32 million people represent an enormous political potential. The vast majority of the poor, however, remain ineffective in the political arena. Less than three out of five adults within the lowest income brackets vote regularly, while about nine out of ten people with the highest incomes go to the polls. Nor do the poor usually belong to unions, clubs, or other organizations that can dramatize their plight and represent their interests. In political life, the poor are badly handicapped

by their lack of resources. Most are too ignorant, too young and unsophisticated, too sick, or too old to achieve anything like their potential.

Blacks

The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders stated in 1968 that the United States was "moving toward two societies, one black one white—separate and unequal." The striking eloquence of this sentence obscured the fact that it was fundamentally wrong. The United States has comprised many societies, and race has drawn the most obvious and enduring line of division. Since the first slaves were taken ashore in Virginia in 1619, America has had a black society that has been distinctly separate from and decidedly unequal to the white societies. The black man, wrote W.E.B. Du Bois at the beginning of the century, "ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body (Du Bois, 1903 : 3).

No more accurately, of course, than one can speak of *a* Caucasian society can one speak of *a* black society. Many social, economic, educational, and political differences exist among the 26.5 million blacks in the United States. There are some rich blacks, although not very many. More and more blacks have moved into the middle class and have incomes, education, attitudes, and values similar to those of white middle-class Americans. In 1980, the average black had completed 12 years of school, compared with 8.2 years in 1960 (and 12.5 years for the average white in 1980). And 37 percent of all black workers held white collar jobs in 1980, about three times as many as in 1960. Despite these gains, there remain masses of black poor, from the small rural farms to the large city ghettos. The poor of both races bear the same burdens, but the colors of their skin have usually generated enough prejudice and distrust to keep them from acting as close allies. True assimilation of blacks into white American life at any social or economic

level has been rare.

As a result of imposed separatism, a set of black subcultures has grown up, with some practices and speech patterns running back through the slave cabins to Africa. Not only do customs and habits of dress frequently differ, but rural and ghetto blacks often speak what is in many respects a different language from white, middle-class English.

In 1940, about two thirds of blacks lived in southern states; the proportion had fallen to 45 percent by 1980. But even more than from south to north, the pattern of black migration has been from farm to city. Wherever blacks live, most have grown up in an environment more hostile than that of the typical white. If they are poor or near-poor, blacks witness violence almost daily. The black trusts fellow humans less than does the white, and with good reason. A black male is four times more likely to be robbed than a white, and a black woman is three times more likely to be raped than a white female. Blacks are also much more likely than whites to be stopped by police and subjected to humiliating searches or to be hauled off to a police station for questioning.

A black can expect to live seven years fewer than a white person of the same sex, to enjoy three-fifths the income, and to suffer more than twice the unemployment rate. Blacks also bear a disproportionate burden of the costs imposed by President Reagan's cutbacks in governmental spending because of their greater dependence than whites on welfare, public health and housing, job training, and other social programs. Thus most blacks neither have nor can reasonably expect to gain in the near future the material goods that the average white earns. Despite substantial gains, discrimination remains an integral part of every black American's life.

In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that blacks have created their own political subculture. They, too, may endorse the basic principles of democracy, but to them majority rule may mean white domination

and minority rights a black dream. When they express their political views, blacks, compared to whites, assert greater general trust in the federal government and are much more strongly in favor of specific federal programs to carry out school desegregation, to enforce fair employment practices, and to provide jobs and minimal standard of living for all citizens. On the other hand, blacks register far less satisfaction with local government. They are much more critical of such public services as garbage collection, recreational facilities, schools, and, most of all, police protection (Campbell and Schuman, 1968 : Ch. 4).

Table 3.
White/Black Opinions about the Federal Government

Agreeing	Percent	
Statement	Blacks	Whites
The federal government has gotten too powerful	15	59
The federal government should make sure everyone has a job and a good standard of living	81	30
The federal government should make sure Negroes get fair job treatment	89	38
The federal government should make sure Negro and white children can go to the same schools	89	37

Source: Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan, 1968 Election Survey

One of the more important political differences between blacks and whites is not merely the way in which they judge events but also the way each group tends to see—or not to see—the same event, as for instance, the race riots of the 1960s. Blacks tended to find the causes of the riots primarily in social deprivation and discrimination. Whites, on the other hand, were far more likely to blame looters or "agitators." Blacks were more likely than whites to look for cures in social reforms,

while close to a majority of whites saw a solution in stiffer police measures. Whites also claimed awareness of far less discrimination against blacks than did the blacks. Although whites conceded that blacks were worse off than they themselves were, a majority felt the cause was in the blacks themselves rather than in discrimination.

A decade after the riots, the proportion of whites who saw no evidence of economic discrimination toward blacks had risen; and blacks in 1978 were more pessimistic about race relations than in 1968, with more feeling that whites do not care about blacks, that there was little progress being made in reducing racial discrimination, and that there was little hope of eliminating racism in the foreseeable future.

Despite improving economic conditions for many blacks and the easing of discrimination, race remains one of the fundamental sources of conflict in American society. Martin Luther King's dream of people of all races living together in harmony was still a distant goal in the 1980s. King, and generations of blacks before him, had dreamed the American dream, the same dream that brought waves of immigrants from Europe, Asia, and Latin America to the United States. It was a dream of enjoying that equality of human dignity which the Declaration of Independence proclaims to be a self-evident truth, that equality before the law which the Constitution enshrines as a fundamental principle, and that material prosperity which has been achieved by millions of Americans.

White Ethnics

Rising self-consciousness among blacks has been accompanied by intensification of ethnic consciousness among many working-class whites. The movement for black pride and power has not only generated fears among whites whose forebears were immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and central and eastern Europe. It has also increased the sense of separation from the culture of white, Protestant, and affluent America that these people have long felt.

Disdained by WASPs (white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants) and typically by preceding waves of immigrants as well, the Irish, Italians, Poles, and other ethnic groups, including Chinese and Japanese and now Vietnamese and Hispanics, tended to settle initially in neighborhoods already populated by their own people. A common set of ties to family, friends, and customs in the old country, a common language, and a common religion (usually Catholic for the white ethnics), plus a tightly knit family, held most of these people together against the strange and sometimes hostile behavior of the "Anglos." "The point about the melting pot is that it did not happen" (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963 : 290). Indeed, a smorgasboard would provide a more fitting analogy of American society; a rich variety of separate offerings, yet with a degree of similarity in flavor, much of it imparted in recent years by the leveling influence of television.

Ethnic influence on social behavior can be seen most clearly in the working-class neighborhoods of older cities as one goes from an Irish to an Italian or Polish (or Chinese) community. Similar distinctions appear more subtly in the personal styles of life, most especially in family structure. The bonds of affection and, perhaps more significantly, of interdependence that still tie second-generation Italians or Polish families into a unit have weakened among the Irish and seldom exist any more among white, middle-class Protestants.

To a large extent, the Germans, Scandinavians, and Jews have left the working classes and are diffused through the middle and upper classes of America in the suburbs in which these classes largely live. Although the Irish have not yet reached the same degree of economic achievement, they have been more economically and politically successful—and more assimilated into middle-class mores—than the Italians, Poles and other Slavs, Greeks, and Czechs. These groups, still disproportionately made up of manual and skilled laborers, remain aware of their differences from each other and from the rest of Americans.

The white, working-class ethnics are also acutely—and proudly—conscious of having earned the right to be Americans. They shed a disproportionate share of blood in the first three wars of this century, as did blacks in Vietnam. They also feel that they, not the government, lifted themselves out of the stink of poverty. By their own hard labor, they sweated their way up from the slums. Thus white ethnics tend to be parochial in their outlook and wary of public welfare programs. Their own harsh struggle for survival has left scars of distrust of the world outside their own families or neighborhoods.

Hispanic Americans

Almost 15 million Spanish-speaking individuals were living in the United States in 1980. Growth of the Hispanic population has been rapid—the increase during the 1970s was 60 percent—and these "Latinos" will probably outnumber blacks by the end of the century. Like blacks, most Hispanics have been victims of a pervasive discrimination that has limited employment, housing, and educational opportunities. The price of discrimination has been particularly high for Chicanos—migrants from Mexico or descendents of Mexicans who were living in California or the Southwest when the territory was owned by Mexico. For decades they have been blatantly exploited by the dominant Anglos of the region. In other respects, the Latino experience has resembled that of European ethnics. Few Hispanics arrive able to speak English; they share a Catholic religious heritage; and they come from a variety of homelands—Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Columbia. Some, most notably the business and professional refugees from Castro's Cuba, have assimilated relatively easily; others have found no way out of the sprawling barriers of Los Angeles, San Antonio, Miami, and New York.

Like other newcomers, Latinos have paid heavily for their entry into American society, in terms of unemployment, menial work, poor public

services, bloodshed, poverty, and dashed hopes in the land of opportunity. Low rates of political participation and exploitation by unscrupulous Anglo and Latino political leaders have reduced their impact on the political system. During the 1970s, however, Hispanics began to flex their political muscles—electing increasing numbers of their own to local councils, state legislatures, and Congress. Latinos and their political leaders have grown more aggressive in their quest for greater recognition of the Hispanic population, its numbers, language, and other special needs. They favor government efforts to help the disadvantaged, but feel that federal programs have been aimed primarily at blacks, to the detriment of the Latino poor.

Women

In many respects, the political behavior of women resembles that of men. More education and income increase the likelihood that women will vote and otherwise participate in politics. Class, racial and ethnic affiliations have much the same effect on voting and political attitudes of women as of men.

Women, however, also face special obstacles that derive from their historically subordinate role in American society. Sexual stereotyping has reduced educational and economic opportunities for many women. Automatic assignment to females of responsibilities for child care and domestic life limits the horizons of large numbers of women. Male dominance of households, social groupings, and organizations restricts female participation and influence in all sorts of activities. Nor have women enjoyed the same legal rights as men, although recent changes have considerably improved their legal position. Women were not guaranteed the vote in federal elections until the enactment of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. As a consequence of these barriers, women fill a disproportionately small share of the positions of influence in the American economic, political, and social life.

During the past decade, growing numbers of women in the United States have rebelled against their subordinate status. In a variety of ways, Women's Liberation has raised the consciousness of females and males about the position of women. Given the enormous diversity of attitudes in the female population, however, the women's movement had been cross cut by other social, economic, and political forces. Catholic women are less likely to be mobilized in favor of liberal abortion rules than other women. Black women are more concerned about sexual *and* racial discrimination than their white sisters. Married women and single females have different interests on some issues, middle-class women differ from welfare mothers on others.

Despite this diversity, large numbers of women have mobilized politically to support efforts to eliminate sex discrimination in employment, to secure more effective and less humiliating laws dealing with rape, and to demand more positions of leadership in all aspects of American life. More and more women are running for—and winning—public office. And in 1981, a woman was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court, leaving the presidency and vice presidency as the only remaining all-male positions in American politics. Even more important, fewer women accept the subordinate roles which the dominant male society traditionally assigned them. One evidence of this change is the growing divergence of women's positions on a number of important issues from those of men—with women more skeptical of defense expenditures, more supportive of social programs, and more concerned about the quality of life than men.

Moreover, women are now voting as often as men, and their ballots are reflecting their interests *as women*. Ronald Reagan has been much less interested in promoting sexual equality than the leaders of the Democratic party, and in 1980 and 1982 women voted more heavily for Democratic than for Republican candidates.

Table 4.
Women Holding Elective Office, 1975~1981

	1975	1980-1981
Congress	21	21
Statewide offices	30	34
State legislatures	610	908
County governments	456	1144
Municipal governments	4650	14176

Source: Center for the American Woman and Politics

3. Violence as a Cultural Trait

Deeply embedded in American political culture is respect for "the rule of law," the notion that all governmental action must be based on previously announced rules, so that formal principles and not individual whim or gain determine public policy. Alongside this hallowed stream, however, has run a clearly discernible trickle of thought justifying, and at times glorifying, violence. It may be a remnant from a frontier society that depended heavily on self-help for survival. Moreover, much of what passes for American art and literature today are often assorted mixtures of sex and sadism, as anyone who has read paperback novels or seen X-rated movies can testify.

Even serious American writers like James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, Stephen Crane, Ernest Hemingway, and Norman Mailer have been fascinated by violence. At one level, they deplored its use, but again and again they returned to it, exploring in fine deatil death struggles on the frontier, on the battlefield, in the bullring, or in the execution chamber.

Underlying this literary preoccupation have been frequent resorts to illegal or "extralegal" violence in the world of action. Indeed, the United States was conceived in a revolution against tax collectors and came to its maturity in a gruesome civil war.

Violence has been a recurring theme in the unhappy history of race

relations in America. Before 1861, there were at least 250 abortive slave revolts. The civil war ended slavery but not violence from racial relations. White mobs lynched more than 3,000 blacks between 1882 and 1959. In the 1960s, race riots in northern ghettos became such a common summer happening as to merit no headlines outside the affected city; and in the 1960s and 1970s, a few black gangs resorted to racial terror by assassinating policemen and randomly robbing and sometimes murdering white private citizens.

When H. Rap Brown, a black militant leader, said that violence was as American as apple pie, he was offering a reasonably accurate description of a part, although only one part, of American culture. The thread of legal, peaceful change may be far stronger; but the recurrence of violence indicates a persistent failure of the political system to achieve its avowed goals of ensuring both justice and domestic tranquility. This failure is hardly unique to America. A generalization about European history that applies to Asia, Africa, and Latin Americat as well as to the United States holds that "collective violence has flowered regularly out of the central political processes... The oppressed have struck in the name of justice, the privileged in the name of order, the in-between in the name of fear" (Tilly,1969:5).

In defense of the American system, one can note that a nation, carved out of a wilderness, has absorbed millions of immigrants from almost every race, religion, and country of the world. The significant points may be that there has been such little rather than so much violence and that such a small proportion of it has been directed against the system itself. Furthermore, there is a difficult moral dilemma here that has confounded political philosophers over the centuries: In many circumstances, violence may be the only alternative to submission to tyranny. On the other hand, resort to violence to correct major injustices when peaceful means are available can threaten the existence of society. No one has yet constructed a scale to weigh such matters objectively.

4. Political Socialization

If a society is to survive for any substantial period of years, it has to pass on from generation to generation its morally approved beliefs and customs. Sociologists refer to this process as *socialization*. Political socialization is the means by which a political system indoctrinates a new generation, as well as a means by which new generations learn to become mature political participants, following an old or a new set of values.

Experiences in early childhood begin the educational process. In relations with parents, brothers, sisters, and playmates, the child discovers authority, obedience, punishment, and the opportunities, benefits, and costs of freedom. Indoctrination with moral values by the family or church helps the child construct ideas about justice, fair play, and permissible limits of behavior.

Later, children transfer these notions to the political world. In the United States, they begin to do so very early in life. Even before they go to school, American children are very much aware—and roudd—of their national identity. By the second grade, if not before, many of them think of themselves as Democrats or Republicans, although this partisan identification is almost totally emotional. Children usually have favorable attitudes toward those in authority. Perhaps as a carry-over from a permissive family environment, most young American children look on public officials as "good men" who do "good things" for people. By their early teens, children are reasonably well informed—compared to their parents—about politics, And, by mid-teens, their views are usually sufficiently firm that they can fit their specific policy preferences into a more general political orientation,

It is probable that this learning process continues through much of life. As a young person gathers experience, initially uncritical attitudes toward authority moderate and become more sophisticated. But psy-

chologists still believe that early experiences make the most lasting impact on a person's outlook on life. It may well be that the strong emotional attachments of children to country and government are what keep people loyal in later years to their political systems, despite the frequent failures of all systems to fulfill their promises.

Political socialization operates in a number of formal and informal ways. The patterns of trust, obedience, and freedom of preschool years have important political spill-overs. In addition, children may hear discussions of political affairs, and parents or other family members may "explain" some current event. These "explanations" are likely to be very simplistic and highly moralistic, couched in terms of the good guys (us) against the bad guys (them). In school, the authority of the teacher is added to that of the family. Children are taught, though they do not necessarily believe, such principles as "good boys and girls obey their teachers" or "good boys and girls settle their differences without hitting each other."

More formally, saluting the flag, reciting the pledge of allegiance, and singing the national anthem reinforce national identity. So does repeating legends of heroes like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, whose truthfulness and honesty are often stressed more than their political accomplishments. Reading and teaching in history, geography, and civics provide a pool of specific, although simplistic, information about national ideals and traditions.

Even religious instruction may play a role. In inculcating ideas about the Deity, churchmen indirectly teach something about the nature of authority and the necessity of obedience. Furthermore, many religious groups frequently go out of their way to praise the political system and to stress the smooth compatibility between fidelity to their theology and loyalty to America.

Not all groups in society go through the same processes of socialization, either formal or informal. Nor, of course, do all persons react to the

same influences in the same way. Uniformity of socialization is impossible in a culturally and economically diverse country. Even among young children, differences in social class, religion, and race are accompanied by differences in political orientation. Black children, for instance, tend to display less feeling of political effectiveness than do whites. Blacks also develop earlier than whites a less idealized outlook on government officials.

Adult immigrants go through a much different form of political learning. First of all, they have the difficult task of uprooting old national identifications and loyalties, building new ones, and perhaps accepting new standards of civic conduct. Historically, socialization of waves of immigrants often reversed the usual generational order: It was the children who passed American culture on to their parents. They learned the new ways in the ways in the neighborhood and more importantly in school and transmitted these customs and beliefs to their parents both in words and in behavior that would have neither been understood nor tolerated in the old country.

The foreign immigrant's socialization is usually more formal than that of the natural-born citizen. The immigrant is more likely to receive more political education from reading, from lectures, and from direct experiences with public officials than from the slow process of gradually being exposed to more and more complex relations. The federal government suggests that all aliens interested in becoming citizens read several textbook that explain the ideals of American government.

Government plays a direct role in the process of socialization, both for the immigrant and the native-born. As we have seen, the conduct of public officials can stir respect or contempt for prevailing customs, processes, and values. The speeches, opinions and writings of presidents, governors, legislators, and judges can help shape political beliefs. The way professional politicians campaign, run their offices, and train other professionals makes them carriers both of the general political culture

and of the more particular rules that allow the system to operate.

Socialization, of course, does not mean merely preserving the cultural status quo. It can also be an instrument for change. The Russians, Chinese, Japanese after World War Ⅱ, and Germans both under Hitler and since World War Ⅱ have deliberately tried to educate children away from old political standards and patterns of conduct. No educational system can ever be politically neutral. By its practices as much as its teaching, it inevitably encourages some kind of political conduct and discourages others, just as the political system inevitably influences the content of beliefs transmitted.

Moreover, socializing processes may be so effective that they promote unintended change. They fill some people with such high political ideals that when they reach adulthood, they cannot accommodate those ideals to a world inhabited by fallible humans. Alternatively, as in the People's Republic of China, sudden sweeping shifts in "correct" dogma expressing the nation's ideals may leave people cynical about politics or at best afraid to express their views.

5. Patterns of Political Cultures

One can speak of *an* American political culture only in the most general sense. It is much more accurate to talk of *political cultures.* Yet there are forces undermining diversity. Mass communications are a particularly important leveling force. Movies, radio, and most of all television are providing common patterns of speech. More significantly, the mass media of communications generate, especially among children, common standards for individual, social, and political behavior. This power to shape the collective psyche of the nation is awesome, apparently too awesome for most television producers to appreciate, or if they do, to bring them to agreement on what the content of this socialization should be.

Whatever the long-range effects of television and other means of

communication in unifying American culture, at the moment the United States is still pluralistic. These cultural divisions affect the way people look at, and behave in, politics. Among the more significant recent trends has been the erosion of popular trust in the political system, an erosion that has expressed itself in violent outbursts and in quiet, reasoned replies to the questions of the pollsters.

Without a deep and widespread belief that the governmental system, for all its faults, is basically fair and reasonably efficient, *political stability* cannot last, especially not in a nation whose people are so different from one another. Without a wariness of governmental power, *political freedom* may not last long. If stability and freedom are to have a substantial chance of coexisting, trust in and wariness of government have to coexist. Perhaps the greatest danger to freedom occurs when a low level of trust in a democratic regime is accompanied by a lack of fear of political power itself.

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