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Intellectual History, Democracy, and the Culture of Irony

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In today's world, cultures often rest on conventions. As the fanfare and fireworks announcing the birth of the year 2000 spread around the globe, from Asia to Europe to the Americas, historians could not help but think about an inconvenient fact all the revelers had agreed to overlook. Although there is little reliable evidence about the historical figure Jesus of Nazareth, we do know that he was born during the reign of Herod. Since we also know that Herod died in 4 BC, Jesus must have been born no later than 6 or 5 BC – perhaps the best reason for replacing the customary BC with the designation BCE (before the common era), which acknowledges the conventional rather than historical quality of the dates we have agreed to use. The error seems to have been made by the sixth-century monk Dionysius Exiguus (or, to use the name he preferred, "Dennis the Small"), who gave us the dating system formally adopted by the Synod of Whitby in 664 without knowing much about the history of Judea. As the world breathlessly approached January 1, 2000, I found that knowing we had already entered the twenty-first century five years earlier tended to dampen my enthusiasm about the millennial celebrations, whether they were to occur in 2000 or (as I and others who learned to count with 1 rather than with 0 thought more appropriate) 2001.

But I have changed my mind. What happened as December 31 gave way to January 1 made a lasting impression on me, as I gather it did on many people, although perhaps for rather different reasons depending on the nature of one's celebration. As my wife and I watched television on December 31, we were surprised to see what appeared to be a genuinely global celebration unfolding gradually from East Asia through the Middle East, then spreading from Central to Western Europe, as people from around the world, people from various religious traditions or with no religious affiliation, joined to acknowledge the end of one millennium

and the beginning of another – even though in China it was the year 4698, for Zoroastrians 2390, for Muslims 1421, and for Jews 5761.

Why does it matter? The answer to that question relates directly to the theme of this chapter, the relation between intellectual history, democracy, and our contemporary culture of irony. It matters, not only because it is amusing that millions of Westerners actually missed the proper date for their own festivities, and by several years rather than a few days, but also because billions of people around the world, people from various cultural traditions that have little in common, agreed to celebrate a milestone that was perfectly arbitrary. The dating system that we follow is a convention, a construction, something made rather than found. Although no more than a cultural artifact deriving from a miscalculation made centuries ago by an obscure medieval monk, it stands as a symbol of our capacity to reach agreement about when days, years, and centuries should be understood to begin and end. Even though the majority of the world's people do not share the Christian faith that generated the dating system we all now follow, most of those people have decided to agree that, in addition to keeping track of time by their own systems of dating, they will acknowledge and abide by the rules of the conventional Western system simply so that people all over the world can agree on what time it is and what date it is. We take that agreement for granted. We should not: its significance deserves more than casual notice.

Skeptical readers may wonder whether I am claiming that such an obvious manifestation of Western hegemony has anything to with democracy or that such conventions emerge through anything resembling public debate. Of course not. But even if we admit that such conventional arrangements do not embody Truth (with a capital T) or the wisdom or superiority (rather than the historical power) of the West, if we admit that they are arbitrary (and even mistaken, given what we know about the birth of Jesus), we should nevertheless admit that the convention works: it keeps everybody on the same page of the calendar. It enables international commerce, travel, and academic conferences to proceed more or less on schedule. Finally, it contributes to the apparent shrinking of differences that is part of the phenomenon commonly called globalization. Globalization may not alter the culturally variable lived experience of temporality, but nevertheless lays across it a grid of conventional measurement that facilitates transcultural communication and cooperation.

Those preliminary observations about convention bring me to democracy. When the democratic form of government was consolidated for the first time in a modern nation state, when the principle of popular

sovereignty became the rationale for the institutions of government and law in the United States in the late eighteenth century, they were justified by invocations of a timeless and universal set of natural laws, laws handed down by God to man and inscribed in reason and conscience. Since we no longer share that confidence, we now talk about popular sovereignty as a fiction, about democracy as a myth, and about the hegemony of an ideology that masks the ability of elites to rule the unwitting masses by waving words in front of their faces. We discuss the invisible workings of an alliance between power and knowledge to sustain disciplinary regimes that command obedience without anyone quite knowing how or why they do. We expose the arbitrariness of signifiers and explore the endless proliferations of meaning in texts. In our day we deal in unmaskings, in disclosure. We busy ourselves rubbing off the glitter that used to elicit reverence, reverence we replace with a hermeneutics of suspicion, a wide-ranging distrust of all claims to authority that culminates in ironic detachment if not cynicism.

In this chapter I want to advance three arguments, all of which depend on the awareness that we now inhabit a world governed by conventions, a culture of irony. First, I will argue that intellectual history is important in that culture of irony because it directs our attention to the questions of meaning that should now be central to our aims as historians. Second, I will argue that the idea of democracy, both as an ideal and as a cultural category, should become central to our thinking about American history, and I will contend that during the last decade it has been dissolving the standard categories of republicanism and liberalism, and those of race, class, and gender, through a more fluid and historically attuned way of understanding the American past. Third, I will briefly suggest that the comparative or transnational study of intellectual history in general and of democracy in particular might provide an especially promising approach that can yield valuable insights unavailable to those who view American history within a narrow national or subnational framework. By necessity, I will discuss these three topics, which move from particular questions of methodology to questions of global history, in decreasing detail. By choice, I will discuss them in expository modes ranging from analytical to hortatory to speculative.

In the first place, I contend, to highjack a phrase from an essay published as early as 1981 by the historian of early modern Europe William Bouwsma, that "we are all intellectual historians now."[1] Bouwsma was not proclaiming the triumph of Wilhelm Dilthey or Bendetto Croce, or of Arthur Lovejoy or Perry Miller (and neither am I). He was merely

pointing to the importance that historians of all kinds – social, economic, political, and diplomatic historians; historians of race, regions, religion, gender, ethnicity, and labor – were beginning to place on understanding not only what happened in the past but what it *meant* to those we study and what it means to us. Because we now recognize the role that previously overlooked people have played in shaping their own history, we see them as agents who made choices rather than as pawns who were controlled by others or by a monolithic force called "history." If we want to take seriously the experience of the subaltern, we must pay attention not only to what was done to them but what they did themselves and why they did it. We must see the world as they saw it and understand why they made the choices they made. Our focus on meaning has emerged gradually, and irreversibly, I would argue, after the explosion of information that followed upon the expansion of historical inquiry in the 1960s and 1970s. That expansion has now transformed the study of history by introducing new questions and new approaches. Many of the contributors to this volume have contributed to that expansion and rethinking of historical study, and their chapters reflect that transformation.

But, once we have discovered the worlds we had lost or ignored, we want to understand the experience of those who inhabited those worlds, people formerly unknown or invisible to historians. Achieving that understanding involves interpreting various kinds of evidence, some of which are nonlinguistic, but much of which comes to us through textual records. Those records we try to decipher, decode, and interpret. Those traces of the past we must approach – self-consciously or not – using the standard procedures of intellectual history, the method of hermeneutics. We must move carefully, systematically, from considering the perspective of those we study to our own perspectives and then back again. We must probe meanings by moving constantly, repeatedly, from the part to the whole and back to the part, from the text to the context and back to the text, from the minutely particular to the more general and back to the particular, and from the past to the present and then back again to the past. This is a difficult and painstaking process, and the linguistic turn of recent critical theory and our contemporary sensitivity to multivalence and transgression have made it even more challenging. We must still study authors, texts, genres, contexts, and traditions with the care lavished on them by earlier practitioners of intellectual history inspired by Dilthey's hermeneutics, and we must be equally alert to the complex and changing patterns of reception and response that greeted their texts. Moreover, whereas literary critics or cultural theorists may be able to generate provocative and valuable "strong readings" without necessarily paying

any attention whatsoever to the *historical* meanings of texts, the meanings that texts had for their authors and/or readers, historians have a different aim. Historians' imaginations must continue to be disciplined by rigorous analysis of the evidence we find of the meanings individual historical actors understood, whether those actors were central or peripheral, powerful or disinherited, rather than presenting the meanings we can tease out, engender, or impose through the unconstrained exercise of our own creative powers as readers.[2]

The study of meanings has transformed intellectual history as much as it has transformed other historical fields. The long-predicted crisis of intellectual history, a crisis being proclaimed in the direst of terms when I was beginning graduate study in 1974, at the height of enthusiasm for the new social history, has not occurred. Instead, we are witnessing an unprecedented explosion of work in intellectual history, understood broadly as the study of the history of meanings, even if many of those engaged in that work often designate themselves cultural historians rather than intellectual historians. In 1959, when one of the most prominent and widely admired practitioners of intellectual history, Merle Curti, published *The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County*, he inaugurated a shift in the focus of intellectual historians that has continued to the present day. Curti probed not only the settlement patterns on the Wisconsin frontier but "the social creed" of its inhabitants, not only the demographics and economic and political institutions but the "shared experiences and shared decisions" of those transgressive men and women who created that liminal, borderland culture of hybridity. After Curti's explicit joining of quantitative and qualitative analysis, of intellectual and social history, neither intellectual history nor social history looked the same. The Organization of American Historians, as a well-deserved but perhaps ill-conceived tribute, began, a generation ago, to award a prize in Curti's name, in even-numbered years to a book in "intellectual history" and in odd-numbered years to a book in "social history." As authors, publishers, and prize-committee members know, it has become increasingly difficult to decide which books fit which category, a problem Curti himself never had to confront because his own work spanned the two artificially divided "fields." The same was true of the work of the many American historians trained by Curti or by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., whose Harvard course "American Social and Intellectual History" provided the model for much of the teaching done in American universities from the 1930s through the 1970s.[3]

Despite common assumptions to the contrary, it is as rare now to find intellectual historians confining their analysis to the narrow explication

of a few texts written by intellectuals, or treating the historical meanings of those texts as unproblematical, as it is to find social historians providing quantitative descriptions of the behavior of ordinary people without interpreting its meaning and significance. Intellectual historians now trace the movement of ideas and values across different domains, from religion to popular culture, from race to politics, from gender to the economy, as well as among those who made it their business to write books and scholarly articles. Intellectual history is currently merging with other fields ranging from the history of ethnicity to the history of law, from cultural studies to gender studies. Most scholars who call themselves intellectual historians do not examine disembodied "ideas" in isolation from the people and cultures that produced and disseminated, read and responded to historical texts. They look instead at the intersections between the writings of those who produced books or sermons and those who produced diaries, or spoke at public rallies, or sang songs, or marched in parades, or testified in revivals, or yelled at sporting events, or argued in courtrooms. What did these various activities *mean*? How should we *understand* what they did and what they said?

There is something odd about the disdain that some self-styled hard-nosed empiricists, whether they are social, economic, or political historians, express toward what they think of as intellectual history. For all historians, whether we like it or not, are intellectuals. Taking ideas seriously, our own ideas and the ideas of others whose work we read, teach, criticize, and evaluate, is what we do for a living. What is unsatisfying or disreputable about such activity? It is what we all do, whether the ideas we take seriously are ideas about the meaning of voting data or geographical mobility, ideas about how authority was exercised in the household, the field, or on the shop floor, or ideas advanced by writers who came before us. As the boundaries between specific fields become ever more permeable in the increasingly interdisciplinary academy of the twenty-first century, we all increasingly depend on each other's work to do our own. Our practice as historians, our own work as intellectuals, shows the folly of reifying distinctions between the fields we occupy.

Let me turn to specific cases to illustrate these general propositions. In 1998 and 1999 I was honored to serve as chair of the Organization of American Historians Curti Prize committee in intellectual history. Like all historians on such committees, I found myself drowning in a flood of books I wanted to read. Committee members read dozens of splendid books, and the dynamic I have been describing made our decision especially difficult. That experience convinced me Bouwsma was right: we are all intellectual historians now.

After lengthy debate, we awarded the prize to Rogers Smith, a scholar located in a Department of Political Science, who considers himself a specialist in constitutional law and political theory rather than intellectual history. Smith's splendid book *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* uses the idea of "ascriptive Americanism" to explain our nation's recurrent reinscriptions of exclusionary hierarchies even after their repeated repudiation during the periods of the Revolution and Confederation, the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the Civil Rights Movement and the Great Society. Not only does *Civic Ideals* cross conventional boundaries between and within the disciplines of history, political science, and law, almost all the books our committee considered finalists were later awarded prizes by other committees of the OAH or the American Historical Association that were *not* supposed to be looking at intellectual history. I will mention only five of these books from many possibilities: Christine Heyrman's study of antebellum Southern evangelical religion, *Southern Cross*; Daniel Rodgers's study of European influences on American progressives, *Atlantic Crossings*; Amy Dru Stanley's study of the relation between contract theory, race, gender, and law in late nineteenth-century America, *From Bondage to Contract*; Matthew Jacobson's study of immigration and race, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; and Linda Kerber's study of the relation between rights and obligations in the circuitous journey American women have taken toward full citizenship, a fine book with the odd title *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies*. Kerber's book, like the others I named, has won multiple prizes from different groups, including the Littleton-Griswold Prize in legal history from the American Historical Association, another committee I served on in 1998 and 1999. That committee, too, faced the daunting challenge of deciding what constitutes legal history now that the lines between law and culture have grown so faint, and several of the same books mentioned above were among the finalists for the award.[4]

In sum, my experiences on the Curti and Littleton-Griswold prize committees confirm my conviction that, even if we are not all intellectual historians now, many of us historians – including many of those who are writing histories winning prizes in the fields we somewhat arbitrarily designate social, political, and legal history – are doing work that falls as easily within the increasingly capacious boundaries of intellectual history as it does within other categories of historical scholarship.

Consider several recent studies of early American culture that demonstrate this tendency to blend various kinds of evidence into persuasive historical arguments. Stephen Innes's *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of Puritan New England* is a careful analysis of

socio-economic history that demonstrates how inseparable the Puritans' religious faith was from their attitudes toward productivity and profit. Innes recovers but sharpens Max Weber's insights by combining astute treatments of Puritan religious and ethical ideas with an equally incisive and detailed treatment of the economic activity that brought unexpected prosperity to New England. His analysis amplifies and confirms arguments advanced by Christine Heyrman in her first book, *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690–1750*, another study that marries the close analysis of economic activity to an equally careful rendering of the thought worlds of those early settlers who managed to derive unexpected profits from the sea. Only by paying close attention to the Puritans' thought and their behavior can we see the futility of asking when or whether they should be understood as "precapitalist" or participants in the "market revolution," wooden categories that blind us to their own complicated experience rather than illuminating it for us.[5]

The study of American religion has likewise been transformed by generations of scholars well-grounded in Puritan theology but more interested than Perry Miller in connecting philosophical treatises and sermons with lived religion. David D. Hall, whose book *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* exemplifies this approach by combining intellectual and social history, has recently argued that Puritanism should be seen as a "middle way," a *practice* of negotiating conflicts on central issues in which there were ambiguities in doctrine and persistent disagreements about practice. In contrast to Miller, who sought to delineate precisely the doctrine of Puritanism and then to demonstrate why the Puritans suffered from guilt because of their failure to live up to their ideals, and in contrast to social historians of the 1960s and 1970s, who judged Puritanism irrelevant because of the gap between social life and Puritan ideals, Hall portrays Puritanism as the unending process of negotiating the meaning in practical terms of doctrines that might have been unchanging in principle but whose application was often ambiguous. They were consequently, from the beginning, "contested," "multilayered," and "fluid" – key words in this new form of intellectual history. "This fluidity [in the play of meanings]," Hall observes, "had much to do with the structures and differences in everyday life, be these the difference between clergy and laity, men and women, young and old, center and periphery. In acknowledging that religious practices were socially mediated, we move from an essentialist understanding of Puritanism to one that regards it as manifested in practices that themselves were variously appropriated."[6]

Heyrman's study of antebellum Southern religion points, in much the same way, to the interplay between ideas and practice and the impossibility of understanding either dimension of life without the other. Among the pressing issues confronting students of early American culture are the following, none of which can be answered without a rigorous (and difficult) hermeneutical search for historical meanings: why did some Indians respond enthusiastically to the appeals of missionaries, whose complicity in the imperial projects of European powers seems to us transparent? Why did evangelical Christianity spread so rapidly across the American landscape from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century? What role did Christianization play in shaping the diverse cultures of African Americans, whether enslaved or free? Did blacks imagine freedom coming through revolt against slave masters, through the abolition of slavery, or through divine intervention? How did they envision their futures after slavery?[7]

The study of race and ethnicity has likewise moved beyond separate studies of theory and practice. Scholars such as Rogers Smith and Matthew Jacobson illuminate the constructed nature of racial and ethnic concepts, categories, and languages and also the very concrete work such social constructions have done in shaping and constricting the life experiences of those so artificially compartmentalized. Such topics might seem to lend themselves most easily to Foucaultian or Gramscian treatments focusing on the consequences of discursive or hegemonic power. Yet a growing number of scholars seems inclined to take seriously what Dirk Hoerder, himself a veteran quantifier concerned with explaining global migration systems, calls the "emotional/intellectual/spiritual life of the actors and interest groups" involved.[8]

One of the oldest and most distinguished fields of inquiry in intellectual history concerns the relation between social and political ideas and reform movements, a tradition to which Rodgers's *Atlantic Crossings*, like his earlier books *The Work Ethic in Industrial America* and *Contested Truths: Keywords in American History*, is a valuable addition. Given contemporary critical consensus about the ubiquity and invisibility of power and the desirability of transgressive eruptions, such once-familiar studies of political thought now require tortured accounts of the "political imaginary" to explain how those who were supposedly captured within all-encompassing discursive regimes managed to envision alternatives. Earlier historians and theorists, respecting the capacity of individuals to imagine worlds other than those they inhabited, took for granted this human capacity. Today, historians who respect their own capacity to subvert or denaturalize reigning paradigms can approach such inquiries with less

difficulty than can some critical theorists. But given what we know about American politics, as well as political thought, earlier assumptions about an uncomplicated transmission of ideas from theorists to the political process now seem untenable. Once again, our analytical sophistication complicates the challenge facing historians of American public life. In a recent essay, Rodgers argues that we must understand both the visionary's imagination and the shrewdness of party bosses. He deploys an argument developed by the feminist theorist Nancy Fraser: "The successful meeting of social need and imaginable public solution is the intellectual precursor to legislation, and it has dynamics as critical to the political process as the end games of interest and party manoeuvre. As in the study of religion and economic behavior in early America, or the study of immigrants' aspirations and categories of ethnicity, we must integrate the analysis of political ideas with political activity in order to understand American history.

The final category I will briefly discuss is law and gender. Both Stanley's and Kerber's books range across the social history of gender roles, the transformative effects of economic developments, the force of diverse new liberatory ideologies, and the power of the law to maintain – and eventually to change – patterns of authority. Just as both of these books use insights from contemporary critical theory to broaden and deepen the study of legal history, so influential legal theorists, especially Cass Sunstein, Akhil Amar, and Joan Williams, are increasingly relying on historical insights and evidence to propel their reformist analyses of contemporary American law and society.[10] Intellectual history, as I have argued elsewhere, has become an increasingly important voice in contemporary critical debates, and Stanley's and Kerber's books promise to make equally valuable contributions.[11]

My second argument concerns the value of the idea of democracy for our study of history. It is an argument in two parts. The first concerns the appropriateness of democracy as a conceptual framework and as a normative standard in our contemporary culture. Democracy is uniquely suited to our particular cultural moment because we inhabit a culture of irony. Contemporary intellectuals, like many people in our self-consciously hip fin de siècle/nouveau siècle culture, adopt an ironic stance toward all values, traditions, and attributions of responsibility. Like Nicholas Cage's character in the film *Leaving Las Vegas* or Matt Damon's in *Good Will Hunting*, to cite just two of countless potential examples from the 1990s, we keep our distance from any commitments or explanations. Many of us pretend that we cannot quite remember or even

understand exactly why we are doing what we are doing – whether what we are doing is drinking ourselves to death, drifting aimlessly, or making other antiheroic gestures such as writing or reading historical scholarship. In this culture of irony, everything is unstable and up for grabs. All of our activities are subject to critique or exposure as masks shielding ulterior motives – or perhaps shielding the meaninglessness of our lives – so we had better maintain a distance from what we are doing.

That currently fashionable pose is a surface manifestation of a deeper and more significant set of developments in philosophy and critical theory. A thorough-going historicism can be traced to various sources, including the work of Thomas Kuhn in the history of science, Clifford Geertz in cultural anthropology, and Richard Rorty in philosophy. Thanks to their work, and the work of other thinkers in other disciplines, many intellectuals now proclaim that all our commitments are contingent, and that the attempt to escape history is futile. This tendency toward historicism has gathered increasing momentum since 1989. Because no social scientist in Europe or the United States predicted the end of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, some social scientists have admitted, often grudgingly, that universal laws of social and political behavior now seem impossible. The historicity of all ideas and institutions, together with the unpredictability of human affairs, is now fairly widely accepted. In a sense, all intellectuals are historians now. There are, of course, plenty of social scientists who inhabit a never-never land where they engage in a practice they call "rational choice theory," but as a historian I find it hard to take them seriously. The evidence – martyrs, suicides, lottery ticket buyers, and fans of the Boston Red Sox – against their central premise is simply too compelling. This triumph of historical thinking is good news, especially for us historians, since thinking historically is what we do for a living.[12]

But there is a problem implicit in this postmodern culture of irony: a tendency toward distrust and polarization: We have given up on older ideals, older standards, but what at first looked like new horizons now look more and more like dead ends. We have traded in the aspiration to universality for the embrace of difference – for example, the appreciation of otherness. We have given up on the notion of necessity and accept the contingency of our cultural values. Having come to see the oppression masked by claims to wholeness and objectivity, we now prefer the disarray of fragmentation, the particularity of an admittedly subjective perspective. All claims to authority are now immediately suspect, whether those claims come from dictators or popularly elected representatives, from self-appointed seers or apparently selfless idealists.

Studying democracy is especially important today because the idea of democracy is uniquely well suited to this culture of irony. In place of older claims to objectivity with a capital "O" and reason with a capital "R," democracy as an ideal and as a practice offers all individuals the chance to participate in shaping the goals and the procedures that will govern our way of life. Whatever our community – from the local to the global – or our community of discourse – from the informal to the professional – democracy offers the ideals of autonomy, equality, and participation against those of dependency, hierarchy, and exclusion.

These ideals are attractive to many today not because they are grounded in the Enlightenment principles of reason, order, and God-given rights – which was, of course, the rationale offered for them in the eighteenth century. Such ideals appeal today because they are open-ended, because their meanings are subject to negotiation, and because they can accommodate the pluralism of contemporary life. Democracy in the culture of irony can rest on two simple assumptions. First, it is not possible to specify once and for all, or to impose on all persons, a narrow or fixed conception of the good life; for that reason, such decisions should be made according to democratic procedures. Democratic cultures allow different individuals to pursue different objectives by inviting them to participate in the process of shaping the rules of the game and determining its purpose.

The second assumption is equally straightforward: the assumption of uncertainty necessitates deliberation. We cannot know, or impose on all persons, a fixed and unitary conception of the truth. In a democracy, particular, provisional truths must emerge from the process of free inquiry, from the verification of truth claims in experience, and from democratic deliberation understood as the means of resolving – at least provisionally – whatever disputes remain in discursive communities of various kinds. Only when all members of a democracy broaden their perspectives sufficiently to "weigh well" – the original meaning of the Latin "deliberare" – and consider seriously the views of others who disagree with them, is democratic deliberation possible.

An alternative conception of democracy as the mere tallying of individual desires, the elevation of unexamined and indefensible personal preferences to the level of privileged rights or insights, although currently fashionable, is of relatively recent vintage. It dates only from the 1950s. The ideal of democratic deliberation, by contrast, is of ancient lineage. Despite its roots in classical, Christian, and Enlightenment thought, however, it need not be understood as imposing a certain form of reasoning or conversation to the exclusion of others – the logic of educated white males, for example, as against alternative forms of deliberation

preferred by members of other groups. Instead the question of what constitutes democratic deliberation must itself be subject to debate. The expansion of the relevant community is part of the democratic dynamic that has been developing since the re-evaluations of human capacity beginning with the Renaissance and continuing up to the present. Challenges to the forms of argument preferred by those in power is a long-standing tradition that women and minorities today continue by questioning established notions of logic and evidence.[13]

Historians can show how specific debates and struggles developed over the meaning of democracy, how the actual battles fought in American history complicate not only the older, discredited ideals that lacked sensitivity to those marginalized and excluded, but how the too rigid application of new norms can likewise tend to obscure important parts of the dynamic story of democracy. The ideas of difference, contingency, fragmentation, and subjectivity are important reminders that the standards of universality, necessity, wholeness, and objectivity can be oppressive. But without a commitment to democracy as deliberation, such values can prove more corrosive than constructive. Democracy conceived as deliberation can provide a standard of judgment as well as a procedure in our culture of irony. A focus on democracy need not celebrate America; it can provide, instead, merely a way of framing inquiries into America's failure to reach its own democratic ideals.

If democracy is uniquely well suited to the needs of those who embrace a culture of irony in our postmodern moment, democracy also remains attractive – although for different reasons – to those who embrace older ideals derived from the Enlightenment or from religious traditions. Intellectuals who emphasize the importance of democracy on such grounds include thinkers as different as John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor – and some American historians. To such thinkers, some of whom write in the spirit of John Dewey, democracy is not now, nor has it ever been, a question merely of political institutions. Instead, it is an ethical ideal that rests on a conception of what it is to be human.[14]

Historians can make an important contribution to this contemporary discourse by demonstrating in detail how Americans' theory and practice of democracy have developed over several centuries. This means rejecting the standard dichotomies that have dominated our analysis in recent years, since these frameworks are too wooden to accommodate the multitude of individuals in America's past and the complexity of those individuals' aspirations and activities. Rather than arguing about when and how Americans outside the South departed from a precapitalist world of

harmonious community, for example, we should see instead, as Stephen Innes, Christine Heyrman, Robert Shalhope, and others have done, that Americans in the middle colonies and New England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries worked to balance a prudent desire to prosper with equally fervent commitments to various religious ideals.[15] In place of the sterile juxtaposition of liberalism and republicanism, to take another example, we should see how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Americans worked to balance their commitments to individual rights against their equally firm commitments to personal and civic virtue. Willi Paul Adams, in particular, has demonstrated how the early state constitutions used the language of liberalism in their proclamation of rights, the language of republicanism in their invocations of the common good, and the language of democracy in their commitment to the idea of popular sovereignty. This use of democratic ideas might strike Edmund Morgan, Pauline Maier, and other late twentieth-century commentators as a fiction or a myth, but it was as real to Americans of the 1780s as the churches and courthouses in which they gathered to argue and hammer out the rules they adopted as their fundamental law.[16]

It is true that many eighteenth-century Americans feared democracy for the same reason that Tocqueville and Mill later devoted so much attention to it: they realized that it is a broadly cultural ideal rather than a narrow set of institutional arrangements. The principle of democracy is equality, as Aristotle understood well before Tocqueville or Mill or Dewey, and that principle challenges the legitimacy of all forms of hierarchy without turning subversion and transgression themselves into absolute values. If we so uncritically privilege difference as to make it a new, unassailable standard, we merely replace one non-democratic norm with another. As Tocqueville and Mill both saw, the elevation of individuality threatened to submerge reasoned debate beneath a tide of romantic self-assertion. We will have to balance our academic culture's current understandable inclination to heed the voices that would speak on behalf of the disinherited against the need to adjudicate among competing claims and diverse standards of judgment.

The difference between democracy and anarchy has been just as important as the difference between democracy and hierarchy. The principle of popular sovereignty was of such enormous importance in America, as Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood, and Hendrik Hartog have shown in different ways, because it provided legitimacy for the new nation's Constitutional framework and for the authority of those who elected to serve in government. That set in motion a democratic dynamic that developed in ways no one in eighteenth-century America could have

predicted. In Linda Kerber's *Women of the Republic*, John Brooke's *The Heart of the Commonwealth*, Gordon Wood's *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Robert Shalhope's *The Roots of Democracy*, and Saul Cornell's *The Other Founders*, we can see how new generations of Americans took advantage of the unprecedented opportunities presented to them in a democratizing culture to establish new forms of community, new forms of communication, and new forms of enterprise, not out of devotion to a theory of possessive individualism, but simply because they had an unprecedented degree of freedom to make choices for themselves and their families.[17] If we wish to make sense of these choices as they saw them, we must trade in our conceptual categories and adopt their ways of looking at the world instead of ours.

I do not mean to suggest by this recommendation that, as a norm or an analytical category, democracy should simply supplant ideas about rights or the common good. Democracy by itself has never been enough, because, without a commitment to the principle of autonomy, any group of three can yield a majority of two committed to enslaving the other one. Rights matter, which is why African Americans, women, and other marginalized groups have used rights talk in their quest for inclusion in American democracy.

If the principle of democracy is equality, the method of democracy is deliberation, which requires an ethical commitment to the importance of the autonomy of each individual and requires each individual to be willing to advance reasons for his or her preferences. This idea of a republic of reasons stands in sharp contrast to our contemporary culture of irony. The deliberative ideal is apparent in the local and state declarations of independence that preceded Jefferson's draft, in Jefferson's commitment to the vitality of local government, in Madison's characterizations of the debates among delegates to the Constitutional Convention, and in the framers' justification of the provision for Amendment in that Constitution. Unlike the sons of the Enlightenment who made the French Revolution, those who wrote the U.S. Constitution doubted that reason could disclose timeless principles beyond the need for change. Establishing the centrality of that insight is perhaps the greatest achievement of Lance Banning's monumental study of Madison, *The Sacred Fire of Liberty*.[18]

The commitment to deliberation failed to resolve the problem of slavery, although that did not discourage those committed to the abolitionist cause, whose antislavery sentiment developed not from their desire to legitimate a market economy, as David Brion Davis has argued, but because they were devoted to ideals of benevolence derived from religious and political commitments (as Elizabeth Clark and Paul Goodman have

made clear).[19] The commitment to deliberation is likewise apparent in the contrast between Lincoln's caution and the dogmatic certainties of the slaveholders and abolitionists who reviled him.[20] It is apparent in the insistence of Jane Addams and John Dewey, Florence Kelley and Louis Brandeis, Ida Tarbell and Upton Sinclair, that the scale of economic organization is as important as its shape, since only through participation on a daily basis can workers, like citizens, learn to understand and appreciate multiple perspectives and develop the capacity to shape the institutions that envelop them.[21]

Such deliberation, even when premised on ideals alien to the culture of irony, does not in practice promise the resolution of differences, an end to conflict, or a snug consensus. But unless we understand that democratic culture requires a commitment to deliberation as an ethical principle, we cannot explain when and why democracy has failed to work, nor can we begin to move toward understanding or resolving those differences that can be resolved. As Tocqueville pointed out, the commitment to this ethic of reciprocity, to the importance of seeing things from different perspectives and reaching provisional agreement through dialogue and compromise, is at the heart of democracy in America.[22]

The logic of democracy encourages the endless spawning of new ambitions and new expectations that challenge any provisional agreements that have been reached in American history. If historians can make clear that rhythm of frustration and aspiration, they can help complicate the simplistic sloganeering that dominates our politics and feeds the cynicism of the culture of irony. For over a decade studies have been piling up evidence that the politics of "false choices" presented by the two parties has little to do with the American public's perception of the issues and what needs to be done. Other studies show the public's increasing dissatisfaction with the simplifications purveyed by newspaper and television reporters utterly uninterested in policy and obsessed with the "spin" of politics conceived as a game played by cynics.[23]

Because historians have a commitment to the particular, to the specific, and to the hard evidence of the American past, the historical study of democracy can help provide antidotes to the mindless reductionism of so much contemporary political and cultural debate by showing the origins of our difficulties and the reasons why complex, historically-rooted problems resist simple solutions. Historians who write for a broad audience, instead of merely for each other, can help illuminate the origin of problems that politicians and journalists often evade or distort, and thereby help foster the spirit of deliberation that democracy requires. Historians can show how and why the principles of autonomy and equality

have replaced those of dependency and hierarchy. Even more important, they can show how and why that transformation has been partial and complicated by demonstrating the tenacious hold of competing values.

Authority, for example, appealed not only to patricians but to early American feminists such as Judith Sargent Murray, who considered it a fundamental fact of nature and absolutely necessary for stability. When a contemporary critic such as Nina Baym reads Murray as a proto-postmodernist whose work subverts her commitment to authority, historians can help explain the reasons why Murray's feminism took the shape it did rather than the shape contemporary critics might prefer.[24] Religion, to cite a second example, seems to many contemporary commentators to represent tradition and hierarchy against the challenges of democracy. But historians should point out as well the crucial role of religion in the American Revolution, in antislavery agitation, in the parts of progressivism allied with the social gospel, and especially in the Civil Rights movement and the antiwar movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The dichotomy offered by today's pundits between progressives and people of faith cannot be sustained by the historical record.[25]

Finally, historians can help to demonstrate that racism, whether directed toward African Americans or toward Asians or Hispanics, has unfortunately been as American as apple pie. It cannot be made to disappear simply by demonizing all whites or lionizing all nonwhites. Historians who study those excluded from the mainstream of American democracy illuminate the problematical nature of attempts to incorporate diversity within any culture premised on assumptions about the fundamental commonality – most notably, the willingness to abide by the will of the majority – that must underlie democratic institutions. The scope of democratic citizenship expanded during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries largely as a result of changing conceptions of the criteria appropriate for determining who should participate in the decision-making process. The ideas that supplanted older versions of racial supremacy required acceptance of something like the African American thinker W.E.B. DuBois's notion of "double consciousness," the effort to keep in balance – because it is not possible fully to reconcile – the competing demands of the self and the other. Such a democratic self is constituted by the tension between one's own awareness of membership in a particular community – a community defined by race, class, gender, or ethnicity – and one's aspiration to membership in the larger, more cosmopolitan and transracial human community, and one's awareness that the "other" is always multiple rather than singular. These contradictory demands alert individuals – especially, DuBois argued, but not exclusively

members of racial minorities – to the necessity of working to legitimate a cultural ideal beyond the summing up of purely individual preferences.[26]

Only when the preferences of members of a majority are formed through interaction with, and recognition of, the different desires of members of minorities can the latter hope to escape oppression. Only if it is possible to persuade all members of democratic cultures that their ideal must incorporate this sort of "double consciousness," a sensibility to which some members of racial minorities come naturally (albeit painfully), and to which other people come by embracing ethical imperatives such as the Christian law of love or political ideas such as the ethic of reciprocity, will it be possible to move toward the ideal of a "postethnic America" that David Hollinger persuasively laid out in his book of that title.[27] If historians shift their focus from questions of capitalism, or republicanism, or race, class, and gender to the concept of democracy, they will have to be tough-minded about it, demonstrating that merely preaching the values of being reasonable and learning to get along with each other has never been sufficient to destabilize power, end injustice, or secure democracy. Historians can help to reawaken, and to sharpen, the sense of democracy as an unfinished project, to show how earlier battles for democracy have been fought, and to make clear that contemporary American culture is a product of those battles.

In this brief final section I will suggest a third topic: comparative or transnational historical inquiry. Readers familiar with *The Journal of American History* will know that interest is growing in comparative history and transnational history, or simply in perceptions of the United States from other national or cultural perspectives. That development dovetails with both of the arguments I have advanced in this chapter. First, the conception of history as hermeneutics requires interpreting the meaning of American experience with the benefit of critical distance as well as close attention to the historical meanings of texts, and such interpretation can be done more fruitfully when the inquiry proceeds from a variety of different vantage points. Approaching American history in relation to different national histories or from different national and cultural perspectives places the inquiry in a broader framework. If we recognize that all of our frameworks – from our very notion of what date it is to our conception of what history is and what we historians ought to do – are conventions, or constructions, then we are more likely to approach them critically rather than seeing them as emerging from the very nature of things. Second, since the ideal of democracy now commands nearly universal approbation, examining democracy in a comparative or transnational

framework can reveal what is distinctive, not simply about the United States, but about the different experiences of every nation, as well as indicating what, if anything, runs across national borders.

Historians approaching the study of American history from different national backgrounds, and placing that study within different comparative perspectives or transnational analytical frameworks, are as ideally suited to illuminate American democracy as were earlier European commentators from Tocqueville to Marx to Weber. There is something bracing about assessments coming from scholars of America history who are free of the national passions that Americans cannot help sharing, and those assessments are perhaps especially valuable to those Americans who consider themselves critics of the United States. Finally, to bring us back where we started, it becomes especially clear to Americans who venture away from home – as comparativists or transnationalists – that there is something myopic as well as artificial about the cultural self-centeredness that plagues us in the United States. Things are different elsewhere, and the experience of difference can alert Americans, and American historians, to the fact that our own way of looking at our world inevitably prevents us from seeing ourselves as others do. Like the insights hermeneutics provides when pursued with sufficient rigor, that insight can help historians acquire the critical distance they need, particularly in our imperfectly democratic culture of irony.[28]

Notes

1. William Bouwsma, "From History of Ideas to History of Meaning," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 12 (1981): 279–91. A more recent overview of developments in American intellectual history is Thomas Bender, "Intellectual and Cultural History," in Eric Foner, ed., *The New American History*, 2nd edition (Philadelphia, 1997).
2. On these issues see Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge, UK, 1999); James T. Kloppenberg, "Deconstruction and Hermeneutics as Strategies for Intellectual History," *Intellectual History Newsletter*, 9 (1987): 3–22; and James T. Kloppenberg, "Studying Ideas Historically," *History and Theory*, forthcoming.
3. Merle Curti, *"The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County* (Stanford, 1959); John Pettegrew,

"The Present-Minded Professor: Merle Curti's Work as an Intellectual Historian," a paper delivered at the 1997 annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians; John Pettegrew, "A Tribute: Merle Curti, Pragmatist Historian," *Intellectual History Newsletter*, 18 (1996): 70–5; John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (Princeton, 1965); John Higham, *Writing American History: Essays on Modern Scholarship* (Bloomington, 1970).

4. Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, 1997); Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York, 1997); Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1998); Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (New York, 1998); Matthew F. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA, 1998); Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York, 1998).
5. Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of Puritan New England* (New York, 1995); Christine Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690–1750* (New York, 1984). On the unhelpfulness of the concept of a market revolution for understanding later eras in American history, see Daniel Feller's Chapter Three of this volume.
6. David D. Hall, "Narrating Puritanism," in *New Directions in American Religious History*, ed. Harry Stout and D. G. Hart (New York, 1997), pp. 51–83; and David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge, MA, 1990). Other recent examples on this tendency in Puritan studies include Jane Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (New York, 1997); Mark Peterson, *The Price of Redemption: The Spiritual Economy of Puritan New England* (Stanford, 1997); and, with a somewhat different focus on the sociology of intellectuals, Darren Staloff, *The Making of an American Thinking Class: Intellectuals and Intelligentsia in Puritan Massachusetts* (New York, 1998). For broader discussion of the focus on the interplay between doctrine and practice in American religion, see Mark Noll's Chapter Four in this volume.
7. This emphasis on agency runs through many of the chapters in this volume, especially those by Simon Newman, Peter Parish, David Turley, and Christopher Clark.

8. Dirk Hoerder, "From Euro- and Afro-Atlantic to Pacific Migration System: A Comparative Approach to North American History," in Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, forthcoming; Hoerder, "Segmented Macrosystems and Networking Individuals: The Balancing Functions of Migration Processes," in Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, eds., *Migrations, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives* (Bern, 1997); Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: European and World Migration, 11th Century to 1990s* (Durham, 2001). An exemplary exploration of the intermingling of immigrants' thought worlds and their experience is Wolfgang Helbich, "Different, But Not Out of this World: German Images of the United States between Two Wars, 1871–1914," in David Barclay and Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt, eds., *Transatlantic Images and Perceptions: Germany and America since 1776* (Cambridge, UK, 1997).
9. Daniel T. Rodgers, "The Age of Social Politics," in Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*; idem, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Chicago, 1978); idem, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics Since Independence* (New York, 1987).
10. Cass Sunstein, *The Partial Constitution* (Cambridge, MA, 1993); Akhil Reed Amar, *The Bill of Rights: Creation and Reconstruction* (New Haven, 1998); Joan Williams, *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do About It* (New York, 2000).
11. On intellectual history and legal history, see James T. Kloppenberg, "The Theory and Practice of Legal History," *Harvard Law Review*, 106 (1993): 1332–51; and Kloppenberg, "Deliberative Democracy and Judicial Supremacy," *Law and History Review*, 13 (1995): 393–412.
12. For more detailed discussion of these developments, see James T. Kloppenberg, "Why History Matters to Political Theory," in Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (New York, 1998), pp. 155–78; and Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism: An Old Name for some New Ways of Thinking?" *The Journal of American History*, 83 (1996): 100–38. On rational choice theory considered from diverse perspectives, see Jeffrey Freedman, ed., *The Rational Choice Controversy: Economic Models of Politics Reconsidered* (New Haven, 1996), a volume generated in response to Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science* (New Haven, 1994).

13. Two fine overviews are John Dunn, ed., *Democracy: The Unfinished Journey, 508 BC to AD 1993* (Oxford, 1992); and David Copp, Jean Hampton, and John E. Roemer, eds., *The Idea of Democracy* (Cambridge, UK, 1993). For an especially insightful discussion of these issues from a self-consciously feminist perspective indebted to Habermas, see Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York, 1992), and the lively debate in Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (New York, 1995).
14. On Dewey see Steven C. Rockefeller, *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism* (New York, 1991); Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York, 1995); and especially Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, 1991). I discuss Dewey's concept of democracy in greater detail in James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York, 1986), and Kloppenberg, "Democracy and Disenchantment: From Weber and Dewey to Habermas and Rorty," in *The Virtues of Liberalism*, pp. 82–99.
15. See Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth*; Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*; Robert Shalhope, *Bennington and the Green Mountain Boys: The Emergence of Liberal Democracy in Vermont, 1760–1850* (Baltimore, 1996); and Robert Shalhope, "Man-Child in a Changing Time: Hiram Harwood of Bennington, Vermont," a paper based on Harwood's extraordinary diary that Shalhope is developing into a full-scale biography of a man on the frontier who kept a detailed record not only of the way his world was changing but also of his changing aspirations and consolations.
16. Willi Paul Adams, *First American Constitutions: Republican Ideology and the Making of the State Constitutions in the Revolutionary Era*, trans. Rita and Robert Kimber (Chapel Hill, 1980); Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York, 1988); Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York, 1997). I discuss these issues in James T. Kloppenberg, "The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse," in *The Virtues of Liberalism*, pp. 21–37.
17. Bernard Bailyn, "The Ideological Fulfillment of the American Revolution," in Bailyn *Faces of Revolution: Personalities and Themes in the Struggle for American Independence* (New York, 1990), pp. 225–68; Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (New York, 1969); Hendrik Hartog, "The Constitution of Aspiration and 'The Rights That Belong to Us All,'" *The Journal of American History*, 74 (1987): 1013–34; Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, 1980); John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1713–1861* (New York, 1989); Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992); Robert E. Shalhope, *The Roots of Democracy: American Thought and Culture, 1760–1800* (Boston, 1990); Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788–1828* (Chapel Hill, 1999).
18. Lance Banning, *The Sacred Fire of Liberty: James Madison and the Founding of the Federal Republic* (Ithaca, 1995); and on Jefferson, Peter S. Onuf, ed., *Jeffersonian Legacies* (Charlottesville, 1993); and Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville, 2000).
19. For competing perspectives on antislavery see Thomas Bender, ed., *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley, 1992); and Elizabeth B. Clark, "'The Sacred Rights of the Weak': Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America," *The Journal of American History*, 82 (1995): 463–93.
20. Among the multitude of studies of Lincoln and the political culture of Civil War America, see especially Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (New York, 1970); Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (New York, 1992); J. David Greenstone, *The Lincoln Persuasion: Remaking American Liberalism* (Princeton, 1993); Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).
21. On progressivism, especially valuable among recent studies, in addition to Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, and Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, are Eldon J. Eisenach, *The Lost Promise of Progressivism* (Lawrence, 1994); Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade: Women Social Scientists and Progressive Reform* (New York, 1990); Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830–1900* (New Haven, 1995); James J. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston, 1900–1925* (Cambridge,

MA,1998); and Axel R. Schäfer, *American Progressives and German Social Reform, 1875–1920: Social Ethics, Moral Control, and the Regulatory State in a Transatlantic Context* (Stuttgart, 2000).

22. On the ethic of reciprocity and its importance in Tocqueville's analysis, see James T. Kloppenberg, "Life Everlasting: Tocqueville in America," in Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism*, pp. 71–81.
23. See especially E. J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York, 1991); Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Packaging the Presidency: A History and Criticism of Presidential Campaign Advertising*, 2nd edn. (New York, 1994); Judith Lichtenberg, ed., *Democracy and the Mass Media* (Cambridge, UK, 1990); and, more generally, James T. Kloppenberg, "Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century America," in Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism*, pp. 124–54.
24. Compare Nina Baym's Introductory Essay to Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner* (Schenectady, 1992) with Sheila L. Skemp, ed., *Judith Sargent Murray: A Brief Biography with Documents* (Boston, 1998).
25. See Mark A. Noll, ed., *Religion and American Politics from the Colonial Period to the 1980s* (New York, 1990); James T. Kloppenberg, "Knowledge and Belief in American Public Life," in Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism*, pp. 38–58; Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom* (New York, 1992); and Noll's Chapter Four in this volume.
26. A fine introduction to DuBois's thought and the uses to which it has been put is Thomas C. Holt's essay in *A Companion to American Thought*, ed. Richard Wightman Fox and James T. Kloppenberg (Oxford, 1995), pp. 187–90.
27. David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America*, 2nd edn. (New York, 2000).
28. There is a long tradition of comparative or transnational work in intellectual history, and a thorough discussion of such work would require another chapter as long as this one. Fortunately, the contributors to the volume *Rethinking American History in A Global Age*, ed. Thomas Bender (forthcoming), examine these questions in detail and exemplify as well as explore the potential costs and benefits of such studies.