

# Making the American Century

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*Essays on the Political Culture  
of Twentieth Century America*

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## Barack Obama and Progressive Democracy

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Barack Obama has inherited a long tradition of American democratic reform. His writings, his speeches both before and since the elections of 2008 and 2012, and the policies he has advanced in his presidency have emerged from his understanding of the waves of progressive reform that have surged across the landscape of American history since the nation's origins. Again and again Obama has made clear, most explicitly in his second book, *The Audacity of Hope*, that his conception of America's ideals of democracy, autonomy, equality, and justice derive from the struggles fought by earlier Americans who sought to transform those glittering abstractions into social and political reality.<sup>1</sup> He has also made clear that he believes democratic change is inevitably partial and fragile. This essay locates Obama's ideals and his idea of democracy within the traditions that he has identified himself.

Unlike many of his fervent supporters in the fall of 2008, Obama has no illusions about the tenacity of those who oppose his vision of a more egalitarian America. He understands that many Americans today, like many Americans since the late eighteenth century, have cherished a dream strikingly different from his. Whereas he champions greater equality and diversity, other Americans proudly embrace very different ideas. They celebrate a particular strain of evangelical Christianity that is sure of itself and contemptuous of other religious traditions. They affirm the value of economic, gender, and racial hierarchy. They trust that the environment will take care of itself and that the unregulated market will deliver economic growth. Finally, they believe that the wealthy deserve their wealth and should not be forced to address the needs of Americans less successful than themselves. Conflict between these competing understandings of America, as Obama understands better than many commentators on the left and the right, is as old as debates over the Constitution and will remain a feature of

American life. Rather than seeking to end such disagreements or pretending that they do not exist, Obama believes that progressives must face those differences and use the tools available to achieve the limited changes possible within the American democratic framework.

Because of his commitment to a progressive agenda, Obama has antagonized critics on the right. Because of his commitment to democratic procedures that acknowledge the legitimacy and even the fruitfulness of disagreement, he has also antagonized critics on the left.

To his critics on the right Obama is a frightening success, a man who has transformed the federal government, ruined the economy, and undermined national security, a man whose presidency threatens the foundations of the American social order. To his critics on the left he seems a tragic failure, a man who has not fulfilled the promise of radical change that some partisans predicted for his presidency because of his tepid leadership and his cowardly willingness to compromise with the radical right.

Much of that criticism is obviously overblown, but both sides are, to a surprising degree, correct about Obama—even if not for the reasons they would offer. Obama antagonizes the right for some of the same reasons he fails to satisfy the left. He stands for the principles of social democracy that have attracted American progressives for over a century: freedom, equality, and democracy, three short words with multiple meanings. By *freedom* Obama means autonomy, the principle of self-rule, or ordered liberty, which descends from the Puritans through the Enlightenment, into the Whig and Republican parties of the nineteenth century and the progressive, New Deal, and civil rights movements of the twentieth century. It was a shared interest in autonomy that linked John Adams and Thomas Jefferson; James Madison and James Wilson; and Sarah Grimke, Frederick Douglass, and Abraham Lincoln.

By *equality* Obama means social and economic as well as political equality and equality before the law. He means the gradual expansion of the principle of one person, one vote, from the political to the social and economic spheres. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson disagreed about many issues as they aged, but they never wavered from their conviction that the American project would succeed only if the nation's citizens remained roughly equal in their economic standing. For that reason, both opposed the European practices of primogeniture and entail. Both saw that such practices had enabled European aristocrats to consolidate their wealth and power at the expense of everyone else. Both Adams and Jefferson distrusted Alexander Hamilton's schemes for consolidating the power of bankers because both valued producers of wealth—whether farmers or artisans—over those who, in Adams's phrase, only “moved money around.” In a long-forgotten letter to Jefferson, Adams described banking as an “infinity of successive felonious larcenies.”<sup>2</sup> Coming from the pen of conservatives' favorite

founder, Adams's words ought to figure more prominently in debates about regulating the financial sector today.

Challenging inequality, far from manifesting a so-called socialist or otherwise un-American propensity, instead descends from the deepest traditions of American culture. From the days when John Winthrop urged his fellow Puritans to “abridge ourselves of our superfluities” so that every member of the community could have enough to survive, the impulse to ensure that wealth is shared fairly is a fundamental American value that has only recently—and in increasingly brazen terms—been decried. It is also, as Winthrop did not hesitate to point out, the central message of the Christian scriptures.<sup>3</sup> To pretend otherwise, which has been one of the most shrill and insistent claims of many self-proclaimed American traditionalists in recent decades, is to ignore not only the Beatitudes but also a central feature of American political and intellectual history since the early seventeenth century. It was hatred of the privileges accompanying great wealth that motivated many Europeans to emigrate to America in the first place. Anxiety about the consequences of enormous fortunes for popular government has animated American political movements ever since the 1770s, when the first American patriots challenged the prerogatives of wealthy British merchants and aristocrats whom they sent scurrying back to Britain or north to Canada.<sup>4</sup> No citizen of the United States need apologize for criticizing inequality; it is instead the defense of inequality as beneficial that betrays the longstanding American ideal of equality. Criticism of inherited privilege is an American tradition more than two centuries old.

Obama's conservative critics have insisted that there is something un-American about his egalitarianism, but as Alexis de Tocqueville observed in the 1830s, and as generations of populists, progressives, and New Dealers confirmed, the defining characteristic of American society, at least in comparison with other nations of the world, was from the start its aversion to inherited privilege and its commitment to economic as well as political equality.<sup>5</sup> Like pro-slavery ideology, which emerged only in the 1830s when slavery was threatened by abolitionists, so the defense of inequality as a positive good has been present in American politics only episodically, especially in the 1870s, the 1920s, and, with special stridency, since the 1980s. For most of the nation's history it has been the ideal of equality, not the defense of inequality, that Americans have embraced as a distinctive feature of their culture, although the categories of citizens deemed worthy of such equal standing has just as surely changed over time.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, by *democracy* Obama means, as did James Madison and John Dewey, not just a set of political institutions but a way of life, an ethic of reciprocity that requires treating one's adversaries with respect rather than contempt and views differences of opinion in a democracy as a sign of health, an occasion for finding new ideas and new understandings of the common good rather than a warrant

for silencing disagreement. At every stage of American history, other people have held different views of freedom, equality, and democracy, but the meanings Obama attaches to those central aspirations are as American as apple pie. The notion that he is an anti-colonialist whose ideas derive from the anti-western resentments of his Kenyan father cannot be sustained by reading Obama's books or his speeches or by the political positions he has taken, whether in the Illinois state legislature, the US Senate, or the White House.

Other features of Obama's sensibility do distinguish him from many politically engaged Americans, progressives as well as conservatives. Obama is drawn toward a disposition that seems strange to many Americans. Thinkers drawn to the ideas of anti-foundationalism, perspectivalism, historicism, and philosophical pragmatism are skeptical about the existence of universal truths and deny that any ideas transcend the particularity of time and culture. Such ideas descend from the writings of pragmatist philosophers William James and John Dewey to those of the historian of science Thomas Kuhn, the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz, and the neo-pragmatists Richard Rorty, Richard J. Bernstein, and Hilary Putnam. Philosophical pragmatists insist that no propositions, positions, or policies should escape critical scrutiny and contend that all hypotheses should be tested in practice and the results of all experiments subjected to cold-eyed scrutiny. Whereas many contemporary activists, on both the left and the right, proclaim their incommensurable principles with the fervor of true believers, Obama's writings show that he sees things differently. He believes that the pragmatists' commitment to experimentation is consistent with the principles of civic republicanism and deliberative democracy on which America was built and for which it should stand.<sup>7</sup>

Obama encountered profound cultural differences as a child in Hawaii and Indonesia, and his awareness of the need to address such conflicts deepened as he matured.<sup>8</sup> At Occidental College in Los Angeles, he studied history and political theory, first of America and then of Europe, in two year-long courses with the political scientist Roger Boesche, who was writing a fine book about Tocqueville. Almost three decades later, Obama's experience in those courses remained significant enough that he invited Boesche to the White House, where they joked about the "B" Obama remembered having received from Boesche.

In those courses, Obama encountered a wide range of thinkers. Among Americans, Obama was exposed to the ideas of John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, the leading figures in the first successful anti-colonial revolution. *The New Yorker* had it right in its cover illustration of a bewigged Obama sitting in for George Washington.<sup>9</sup> Obama also read some of the Anti-Federalists who opposed the US Constitution; Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau; antebellum reformers including Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln; assorted populists, progressives, and New

Dealers; Protestants active in the social gospel and theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr; and leading figures in the civil rights movement and radicals of the 1960s. On the European side, Obama encountered Greek and Roman political philosophy and the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli, Tocqueville, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Friedrich Nietzsche, complex thinkers who probed the possibilities and the limits of politics.<sup>10</sup> In an interview during the 2008 campaign, Obama counted many of those writers among the most influential in his life, and traces of their ideas pop up regularly in his books and speeches.

Obama reports in *The Audacity of Hope* that he decided to study political philosophy at Occidental because he was "looking for both a language and systems of action that could help build community and make justice real."<sup>11</sup> Given that aspiration, he struggled with the contrast between Weber's and Nietzsche's iconoclasm and the democratic idealism of American reformers. That contrast, between a value-less, post-Christian nihilism and the continuing struggle to "make justice real," was among the insights that led James and Dewey to construct the philosophy of pragmatism in the first place. At Harvard, James helped shape the thinking of George Herbert Mead, Herbert Croly, Walter Lippmann, W. E. B. Du Bois, Gertrude Stein, Horace Kallen, Alain Locke, and Robert Park, individuals who figured prominently in twentieth-century American thought and American politics. They also figured prominently among the progressive reformers whose work Obama first encountered in his studies with Boesche. From his first serious explorations of American political thought, then, Obama was made aware of the influence of the philosophy of pragmatism on progressive political reformers.<sup>12</sup>

After two years at Occidental, Obama transferred to Columbia, seeking a closer connection to African American culture. There he continued to read widely and write on a variety of subjects and began thinking about making a living as a writer. Obama impressed his teachers and fellow students alike as a quiet, reflective young man content to let discussions unfold before speaking, a man temperamentally suited to conflict resolution and capable of synthesizing disparate points of view.<sup>13</sup>

Obama felt unsatisfied with stints in consulting and research after graduating from Columbia. He found work as a community organizer in Chicago, where he quickly showed a gift for inspiring audiences with his vision of participatory democracy. Whereas most community organizers distrusted electoral politics and saw black churches as a distraction from their work, Obama encouraged alliances with elected officials and activist preachers such as Jeremiah Wright, whose example and ministry converted Obama to a version of Christianity that amalgamates elements of liberal Protestantism and African American religious traditions. Although many Americans in the twenty-first century associate religious faith with doctrinal dogmatism, the tradition of Christian skepticism that Obama has embraced is rooted in early Christian communities and has persisted

through two millennia. His self-description as “Christian and a skeptic” also offers an attractive alternative to the rival forms of fundamentalism proclaimed by some Christians who invoke the inerrancy of the Bible and by some equally self-assured atheists who invoke the irrefutable truth of evolutionary biology. Instead Obama has endorsed John Rawls’s argument concerning the value of overlapping consensus and the responsibility of all citizens to make arguments for their political convictions rather than merely positing them as God’s will—or nature’s. After decades obsessing over the arrival date of a fully secular culture, many intellectuals are now following the lead of Rawls, Charles Taylor, and—in his recent writings—Jürgen Habermas in acknowledging the positive role that religious traditions have played in establishing the ideals of human brotherhood and social obligation. If one insists that religious believers must “translate” their convictions into persuasive arguments, as Obama, Rawls, and Habermas have done, one need not dismiss all religious claims as irrational nor assume that only arguments grounded in science have a place in public debate. Peculiar as Obama’s variety of religious belief may seem to secular as well as religious absolutists, it is a hardy strain of Christianity.<sup>14</sup>

Obama decided, after two challenging years working on the far south side of Chicago, that a law degree would make him a more effective advocate for the urban poor. Aware that skeptics might view his choice as an evasion of social engagement, he wrote an essay entitled “Why Organize?” in which he explained his aspirations and his frustrations with the tradition of community organizing descended from Saul Alinsky. Obama argued that Alinsky’s emphasis on confrontation and his distrust of electoral politics, like the resistance of some community organizers to affiliating with religious groups, had proved counterproductive. More fruitful, Obama insisted, was the approach of early twentieth-century progressives such as Jane Addams and Louis Brandeis, who made common cause with labor groups, civic organizations, reform-minded political activists, and champions of the social gospel.<sup>15</sup>

Obama enrolled at the Harvard Law School in the fall of 1988, a time of turmoil in the legal academy. Many faculty members at the Harvard Law School left a lasting imprint on Obama’s sensibility, including especially Laurence Tribe, Martha Minow, Roberto Unger, Derrick Bell, Charles Ogle-tree, and Mary Ann Glendon. His work on the *Harvard Law Review* was particularly decisive in shaping his attitude toward the law and propelling him to national prominence.<sup>16</sup> After graduation, Obama returned to Chicago and began his multi-pronged career as civil rights lawyer, community organizer, and fledgling candidate for political office. He also began teaching law at the University of Chicago, where his colleagues ranged from free market economists and prominent figures in the law and economics movement, including Richard Posner, to politically active progressives such as Cass Sunstein, who

were trying self-consciously to keep alive Dewey’s philosophy of pragmatism and his ideal of participatory democracy.

In Chicago Obama threw himself into multiple activities. He spearheaded a drive to register Chicago blacks to vote. Through friends of his wife Michelle, he developed contacts with downtown Chicago foundations and soon was serving on the boards of several civic organizations. He completed *Dreams from My Father*, which was published in 1995, and the next year he was elected to the state legislature. As Obama began his ascent to national stature, he built not only political networks but also intellectual networks that included colleagues at the University of Chicago Law School and prominent figures from the religious, civic, and academic worlds who came together in social scientist Robert Putnam’s Saguaro seminars in the late 1990s. In those arenas, Obama continued his Tocquevillean lessons in communitarianism and deliberative democracy, two late twentieth-century scholarly discourses stressing the importance for American democracy of participation in civil society.<sup>17</sup>

To understand Obama’s attitude toward American politics and his long-term commitment to breaking the log-jam of American party politics, it is necessary but not sufficient to locate the origins of his sensibility in his formative years in Indonesia and Hawaii; in Los Angeles, New York, and Cambridge; and in Illinois and his father’s native Kenya, which he visited only after his father had died. Of course, the civil rights movement and African American political, religious, and intellectual traditions also helped shape Obama’s sensibility. But it is equally crucial to locate Obama within the frameworks of civic republican and communitarian discourse, within the tradition of philosophical pragmatism, and in relation to the ideas of anti-foundationalism, perspectivalism, and historicism that help explain his aversion to dogmatism.

Obama first encountered such ideas haphazardly, simply by virtue of having to cope with the contrast between the attitudes of his mother and his stepfather while living in Indonesia for several years as a child, then as an adolescent in Honolulu. As a student in college and law school, he breathed an atmosphere saturated with the ideas of contingency and change. Working as a community organizer and then as a lawyer and political activist, he found himself practicing forms of pragmatist improvisation as he tried to bring together multiple traditions and strategies of social action. Whereas many Americans are disoriented by the idea that values vary over time and across cultures, Obama found that way of thinking helpful to understanding his own experience and his emerging understanding of American democracy. Finally, it gave him valuable tools for dealing with the philosophical and political puzzles he was trying to solve.

These ideas come in different flavors, more and less radical and more and less nihilist. To the most radical anti-foundationalists, perspectivalists, and historicists, such as Nietzsche, no ideals stretch across time, across cultures, or even

between individuals in the same culture. Everything is relative. Every judgment is deeply flawed and subject to unmasking. All that remains is power. By contrast, to moderate anti-foundationalists, perspectivalists, and historicists, such as the American pragmatist philosophers James and Dewey, such insights into the contingency and variability of values have a different significance. They help us interrogate our own inherited ideals and subject them to critical scrutiny. They warn us against the self-satisfied recourse to dogmatism that most humans have found comforting, even irresistible. They are not, however, cause for despair of the sort that ensnared Nietzsche. Through interaction with others, and with the world, we can test our beliefs. Even if the results of those tests must remain provisional, open to further scrutiny and further testing, they provide sufficient stability to enable us to move forward, as members of communities located in history, aware of our traditions and self-consciously attempting to realize the ideals we choose to keep alive as our guides.

Obama's use of American history is among the striking features of *The Audacity of Hope*. Of course, mining the past for anecdotes and inspiration is a standard gambit in political writing. But Obama's choices indicate that he understands American history in a particular way that dovetails with the other aspects of his world view. Obama's approach differs from those of most American politicians and aligns him with many of the scholars whose work has been particularly influential in the academic community in recent decades.

The animating ideal of the first English settlers in North America, Obama writes, was ordered liberty. This phrase derives from the seventeenth-century founders of the New England colonies and can be traced forward through the American Revolution to the Whigs and then the Republicans of the 1850s. During the years between the Puritans' arrival in North America and the decade of the 1780s, Obama observes that Americans embraced an ideal of ordered liberty patterned on the Puritans' model. They pioneered a particular kind of democracy premised on what he calls "a fundamental humility" and "a rejection of absolute truth." Although the Puritans surely cherished the absolute truth of their Christianity, the institutions they put in place in New England towns enabled them to govern themselves, which had the unintended effect of destabilizing hierarchical authority in the public sphere and empowering the people. Instead of truth descending from on high, it would bubble up from the unruly deliberations of citizens gathering together in meeting houses to decide for themselves on issues of public concern.<sup>18</sup> These New England town meetings, as Alexis de Tocqueville's New England informants later explained to him, were the "cradle of democracy."<sup>19</sup>

As the first generation of Puritans and equally contentious colonists up and down the Atlantic seaboard experimented with diverse forms of self-government, they gradually accumulated the experience that enabled them to

forge different varieties of more or less democratic government during the 1770s and 1780s. The colonists wrangled with each other in public forums ranging from the town and county to the state and eventually the nation, slowly and unsteadily developing an unusual degree of competence in the tricky business of making, administering, and altering their own laws. That experience of democracy both required and bolstered the "humility" that comes from knowing that one's own convictions are not always shared by one's neighbors. It came in handy when they wrote their state constitutions in the 1770s and 1780s and then debated, and finally ratified, a constitutional framework for the new nation.

Near the end of *Dreams from My Father*, Obama describes the law as the record of "a long-running conversation, a nation arguing with its conscience." In *Understanding the Constitution*, the distinguished legal scholars Laurence Tribe and Michael Dorf attributed to Obama and his fellow Harvard Law School student Robert Fischer the fertile conception of constitution law as a conversation.<sup>20</sup> In *The Audacity of Hope* Obama advances less lyrical but even more provocative arguments about the origins of American law. Against those conservatives who invoke the idea of the founders' so-called original intent, a set of determinate meanings that are said to limit what legislatures and judges can legitimately do, Obama points out—accurately—that the Constitution resulted from a series of compromises made necessary by the depth of disagreement at the Constitutional Convention and during the process of ratification. Moreover, Obama observes that the decision to leave the document open to amendment testified to the framers' realization that the nation's Constitution would have to change, albeit slowly, with American culture in order to survive.

The failure to provide a mechanism for such alterations, the framers understood, had doomed earlier republics to failure when they proved incapable of adapting to changed circumstances. Obama cites a crucial passage from Madison concerning the value and the necessity of open-mindedness in democracy. Reflecting on the process of reaching provisional agreement at the Constitutional Convention, Madison argued that no one felt obligated to hold onto his original opinions when confronted with persuasive arguments advanced by other delegates. Everyone remained "open to the force of argument." That formulation expresses Obama's understanding of democracy as deliberation.<sup>21</sup>

Madison himself, although often credited with having framed the Constitution, did not get the Constitution he wanted. His own position on crucial issues such as the Senate and the authority of the executive changed during the Convention itself, as well as during the debates over ratification, particularly when Jefferson convinced Madison that the Anti-Federalists were right about the strategic necessity, and perhaps even the desirability, of a Bill of Rights.

*The Audacity of Hope* contains no footnotes, and Obama rarely mentions the scholars whose work has shaped his ideas. It seems clear from his discussion of Madison and the Constitution, however, that he rejects claims about original intent and also sees beyond the 1950s-era obsession with Madison's so-called realist pluralism. Many scholars in the 1950s argued that Madison wisely abandoned aspirations to political ideals and settled instead for an institutional structure that would merely facilitate and accommodate the clash of competing interests, an interpretation that served to justify the political moderation of the post-World War II era. Although that view still appeals to many scholars, including those on the right who praise Madison's prudence and those on the left who accuse him of selling out democratic ideals, it has become increasingly difficult to sustain. Recent historians of Madison and the Constitution have demonstrated why the ideal and the practice of democratic deliberation proved at least as important for the acceptance and durability of the Constitution as did the checks and balances built into the new nation's institutional architecture.

Madison's comment about remaining "open to the force of argument," for example, served as the epigraph for *The Partial Constitution*, written by one of Obama's colleagues at the University of Chicago Law School, Cass Sunstein. Although it may be that Obama is a careful student of Madison, it seems more likely that he has been attentive to the transformation of scholarly debate concerning the Constitution. Sunstein's book is replete with discussions of historian Gordon Wood's ideas about civic republicanism, about Dewey and participatory democracy, and about the usefulness of Hilary Putnam's philosophical pragmatism for constitutional law—all ideas Obama encountered at Harvard Law School and articulates in *The Audacity of Hope*. In his first speech to the Constitutional Convention, Madison argued that a federal government, because it would "expand the sphere" of representatives' horizons beyond their local preoccupations to the needs of the entire nation, "was the only defense against the inconveniences of democracy consistent with the democratic form of government." Notice Madison's use of the terms "democracy" and "democratic" in that sentence. The familiar notion that Madison envisioned a republic rather than a democracy is widespread but false. He did envision a representative democracy rather than a direct democracy, and the elaborate checks and balances of the federal framework appealed to him in part for that reason. But his preference for representative democracy hardly makes him an anti-democrat. Other contemporaries who shared that preference included Jefferson and Thomas Paine, two thinkers often contrasted to Madison but with whom he had much more in common from the 1770s through the 1820s than is usually recognized.<sup>22</sup>

Representative democracy is designed to substitute the dynamic process of making reasoned arguments for the simple tallying of votes dictated by constituents' preferences. In Obama's words, it was not only the size of the new nation

that meant "an Athenian model of democracy was out of the question" and "the direct democracy of the New England town meeting unmanageable."<sup>23</sup> It was not just practicality that dictated representation. The process of deliberation, particularly when it brought together people with diverse backgrounds, convictions, and aspirations, made possible a metamorphosis unavailable through any other form of decision-making. People who saw the world through very different lenses could help each other see more clearly. Just as Madison defended the value of delegates' willingness to change their minds and yield to the force of the better argument, so Obama explicitly echoes the arguments of Madison—and, strikingly, of Alexander Hamilton in *Federalist* number 70—concerning the importance of encouraging the "jarring of parties" because such differences of opinion could "promote deliberation and circumspection."<sup>24</sup> Obama contends accurately that most scholars now agree that the Constitution was "cobbled together" from heated debates and emerged "not as the result of principle but as the result of power and passion." The Constitution shows traces of competing arguments drawn from sources including the Bible, the English common law, Scottish philosophy, civic republican traditions, and the Enlightenment idea of natural rights.<sup>25</sup>

Obama the law professor concedes that such a conception of the founding appeals to him because it encourages us to emphasize the contingency of the original document and to appreciate the contingencies that lie beneath our own invocations of high principle. His constitutionalism fits neatly into the historicist framework that was displacing older verities in the academic communities of Los Angeles, New York, Cambridge, and Chicago during the 1980s and 1990s. Such historicism, he writes, might free us to "assert our own values unencumbered by fidelity to the stodgy traditions of a distant past." In other words, it might tempt us to proclaim that constitutional interpretation is a question of shifting conventions or changing paradigms. But Obama admits that such freedom makes him uneasy. He describes it as "the freedom of the relativist, the rule breaker," or "the apostate," and he concedes that "such apostasy leaves me unsatisfied."<sup>26</sup> Caught between historicism, on the one hand, and the persistent yearning for Rawls's stable principles of justice on the other, where can Obama turn?

He turns to philosophical pragmatism and to American history. What we need, he suggests, is a "shift in metaphors," a willingness to see "our democracy not as a house to be built, but as a conversation to be had." Madison did not give us a "fixed blueprint." Instead he provided a framework that cannot resolve all our differences but offers only "a way by which we argue about our future." The institutional machinery of the Constitution was intended, Obama argues, not to solve our problems once and for all but "to force us into a conversation." The Constitution gave birth to "a 'deliberative democracy' in which all citizens are required to engage in a process of testing their ideas against an external reality,

persuading others of their point of view, and building shifting alliances of consent."<sup>27</sup> It would be hard to find in James or Dewey, in Bernstein or Putnam, a clearer statement of the conceptual and historical connections between philosophical pragmatism and deliberative democracy in the American political tradition. In Obama's formulation of this crucial point, the founders wanted above all to avoid "all forms of absolute authority," and the most perilous moments for the new nation occurred when that fallibilism was threatened by attempts to freeze the dynamic process of democratic deliberation by stifling debate. Through this process of making arguments, encountering objections, rethinking our positions, forging compromises, and testing our ideas against a resistant reality in which our schemes succeed or fail, Obama concludes, we learn "to examine our motives and our interests constantly." We learn, in short, that "both our individual and collective judgments are at once legitimate and highly fallible."<sup>28</sup>

Balancing the historicism of cutting-edge constitutional scholarship against his lingering desire for something more substantial than quicksand, Obama makes use of the American tradition of philosophical pragmatism: we should debate our differences and test provisional interpretations of principle, not by measuring proposals against unchanging dogmas but through trial and error, by trying to solve problems creatively and then democratically deliberating, yet again, on the consequences of our experiments. "We hang on to our values, even if they seem at time tarnished and worn," even if we realize that "we have betrayed them more often than we remember." Our democratic values, deliberation and truth testing, constitute the American people as a nation developing over time. Our commitments to freedom and equality are "our inheritance, what makes us who we are as a people."<sup>29</sup> As individuals and as a nation, we are constituted by the values we cherish, the principles we seek to realize, and the democratic process whereby we attempt to reach those goals. In Obama's words, "our values must be tested against fact and experience."<sup>30</sup> Freedom and equality had one set of meanings in the agrarian settlements of the seventeenth century, another set in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and they are destined to have new meanings for every generation. That is the challenge of democracy, and that is the reason why the philosophy of pragmatism is uniquely suited to democratic decision making. When our understandings no longer conform to the facts of lived experience, as has repeatedly been the case in American history, it is time for critical inquiry and substantive change. Ritual invocations of earlier nostrums, as if such formulas could help solve problems earlier generations could not have imagined, deflect attention from the hard work of democracy.

Only through that discursive process, as Madison observed, as Tocqueville confirmed in the 1830s, and as Obama clearly understands, did Americans come to know—or rather to create—what they called a common good. They understood that the ideal of a common good appeared and then receded along the

horizon. It did not exist before they argued about it, and it changed shape as they tried to implement it. In Obama's words, the framers set up "a community in which a common culture, a common faith, and a well developed set of civic virtues" enabled citizens to contain the inevitable "contention and strife" on which democracy depends. By experiencing such struggles, he concludes, Americans learned that the individual's "self-interest" is "inextricably linked to the interests of others."<sup>31</sup>

Writing several decades after Madison, Tocqueville likewise emphasized the liveliness of disagreements as a distinguishing feature of American public life in *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville learned a lot from traveling across the new nation, but the most important of his sources were three self-conscious champions of the idea of "ordered liberty" emphasized by Obama: the New Englanders John Quincy Adams, Josiah Quincy, and Jared Sparks. At the heart of Tocqueville's *Democracy* lay a cluster of arguments about ordered liberty that he took from these informants. Tocqueville stressed Americans' willingness to participate voluntarily in community activities, not because they were uniquely virtuous, but because they discerned the meaning of what he called "self-interest properly understood." From experience they learned to see their own individual interests in relation to the interests of their neighbors, and vice versa. Obama understands the process whereby individual interests can become transformed into something larger. He learned the theory from Boesche and Tocqueville and from Wood and the civic republican revival; he saw—and for several years helped shape—the practice in the far south side of Chicago.

Obama is bewitched by neither the chimerical consensus of Louis Hartz's projected liberal tradition of the 1950s, in which America was defined simply by the universal reverence for property, nor by the shrill originalism of some recent prominent jurists. Instead Obama prefers Tocqueville, because he realizes that Americans have always sought a variety of goals consistent with their very different ideals and aspirations.<sup>32</sup> Democracy means squabbling about differences, reaching tentative agreements, then immediately resuming debate. Obama also accepts something many of his supporters and his critics have trouble accepting: the willingness to endure acceptable compromises instead of demanding decisive victory over one's opponents has been a recurring feature of American democratic culture. Tocqueville never tired of contrasting that characteristic to the fatal unwillingness of his fellow French citizens to reach accommodations with each other. Tocqueville explained the success of American democracy by inverting the lessons of France's failure. Whereas the French Revolution foundered on the civil wars that erupted between monarchists and republicans, between champions of the old regime and the new, and between Enlightenment fundamentalists intolerant of religion and Catholics who remained equally intolerant of atheism, Tocqueville marveled at the willingness

displayed by Americans of different backgrounds to find common ground or at least tolerate their differences. From a variety of experiences ranging from barn raisings to service on juries, Americans were learning to learn from each other. From the perspective of Tocqueville, that transformation both demanded and further developed an ethical sensibility that recognized the legitimacy of difference and the productive potential of disagreement.<sup>33</sup>

In a similar vein, Obama observes that he became committed to American politics, and to seeking elective office, because he believes that something lies beyond the undeniable cynicism and partisanship that prompts so much unpalatable political maneuvering. His inoculation against that cynicism has been tested again and again. Obama's rejection of cynicism and his wariness of partisanship have been among the defining features of his political career, and he knows that they have become more difficult to sustain amidst what he calls the "industry of insult" that drowns out more moderate voices. Obama accounts for his continuing allegiance to civility by invoking a "tradition that stretched from the days of the country's founding to the glory of the civil rights movement, a tradition based on the simple idea that we have a stake in one another, and that what binds us together is greater than what drives us apart."<sup>34</sup>

Appropriately enough for someone who has lived and worked on the south side of Chicago, in neighborhoods not that far southeast of Jane Addams's Hull House, Obama's reference to "that which binds us together" echoes the almost identical words that Addams wrote to explain the settlement house movement in her memoir *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910). Using a phrase she attributed to the founder of the English settlement house movement, Addams professed her belief "that the things which make men alike are finer and better than the things that keep them apart, and that these basic likenesses, if they are properly accentuated, easily transcend the less essential differences of race, language, creed, and tradition." Addams, like Tocqueville, derived her cultural cosmopolitanism from her democratic ideal: "Hull-House was soberly opened on the theory that the dependence of classes on each other is reciprocal." Because "the social relation is essentially a reciprocal relation, it gives a form of expression that has peculiar value," the value added by expanding the appreciation of individuals for those unlike themselves.<sup>35</sup> Obama's fondness for this formulation has become even clearer since his election as President. He has used it in his Cairo address to the Islamic world and in his Nobel acceptance speech in Oslo, and it is a staple of the message he takes to meetings around the United States. For him it captures the heart of democracy.

Hull House inspired a generation of well-to-do native-born women to live and work with recent immigrants from a wide range of different cultures. Since the 1960s critics have maligned and satirized the efforts of such progressive reformers, both men and women, because beneath their language of uplift and

harmony many skeptics see schemes of cultural imperialism and social control. Some progressives did participate in efforts to enforce racial segregation, restrict immigration, and prohibit the sale of alcohol, but the progressives were a diverse coalition that also included democratic socialists and the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Some commentators sagely contrast the supposedly elitist progressives and the supposedly democratic populists, a distinction almost always made to the detriment of the former that neglects the continuity in central aspects of the groups' agendas. Finding veiled, sinister impulses beneath concerted efforts to ameliorate conditions of urban poverty seems to me difficult to do. Settlement house workers such as Addams, whatever else they achieved, did at least begin the process of transforming middle-class attitudes toward cultural diversity and urban poverty, helping to make the former more acceptable and the latter a scandal.<sup>36</sup>

If Obama only indirectly refers to the ideas and example of Jane Addams in *The Audacity of Hope*, he does much more explicitly invoke the progressives' ideas of graduated taxation and government regulation of the economy. These two ideas, embraced by Democrats from the election of Woodrow Wilson in 1912 through the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, have been largely repudiated since the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. In recent decades a bipartisan consensus has formed about the desirability of lowering taxes and around the theory—which the catastrophic recession that began in 2008 has not yet shaken entirely—that state regulation of the economy is less efficient than reliance on free markets. There is also widespread agreement among economists, whether they applaud or deprecate the fact, concerning one of the consequences of deregulating the economy and reducing taxes on the wealthy: the gap separating the richest from the poorest Americans has grown dramatically in recent decades.<sup>37</sup>

That gap separating the wealthiest Americans not only from those at the bottom but also from those in the middle of the range of income distribution shrank from the New Deal until the oil crisis of 1973. It shrank not by accident or through simple economic growth but because of four deliberate strategies: (1) progressive taxation, (2) economic regulation, (3) support for unionization, and (4) massive investment in higher education. In the aftermath of Ronald Reagan's election in 1980, all of those strategies have been deemed inconsistent with American principles. At least partly as a consequence, inequality has soared to levels unseen at least since the late nineteenth century and perhaps unprecedented in American history.

Like the founders, progressives, and New Dealers before him, Obama sees such increasing economic inequality as inimical to democracy. His critique of inequality in *The Audacity of Hope* might seem to place him at the edge of twenty-first-century American political debate, but it descends from a tradition

dating back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Progressives and New Dealers contributed the ideas of a minimum wage, graduated taxation, economic regulation, collective bargaining, and expanded access to higher education in order to update that original American commitment to economic equality—at least relative to the nations of Europe. Progressive reformers adopted a wide range of strategies, but in the economic realm they built on that idea of regulation in the public interest until the retrenchment of government in the 1920s. Franklin D. Roosevelt, after initially resisting the progressives' approach, resurrected it in the New Deal. In Obama's words, the Social Security Act of 1935 was "the centerpiece of the new welfare state, a safety net that would lift almost half of all senior citizens out of poverty, provide unemployment insurance for those who had lost their jobs, and provide modest welfare payments to the disabled and the elderly poor." Although it was full of holes, the Social Security Act represented a beginning, and as it expanded it has provided much wider coverage, particularly for senior citizens. That process of gradual expansion and consolidation might provide a model for healthcare reform in the coming decades.<sup>38</sup>

Obama has no illusions about the mid-twentieth-century Democratic Party. He understands it harbored and humored vicious southern racists who weighed every initiative against their overriding commitment to preserving the South's regime of white supremacy. He knows that the Democratic Party coalition was held together by inspiring ideals—"a vision of fair wages and benefits"—and hard-nosed calculations—"patronage and public works"—and above all by "an ever-rising standard of living." Although Obama applauds the achievements of the New Deal, he acknowledges its limitations—and not only its failure to tackle institutionalized racism. In the 1930s Roosevelt was denounced as too timid by Dewey, Reinhold Niebuhr, and their allies on the radical left, who criticized him for failing to make America socialist when he had the chance. He has been denounced by conservatives ever since for doing just that. Rejecting both of those exaggerated characterizations, Obama credits the New Deal for achieving what was politically possible. His interpretation faithfully echoes and updates Carl Degler's *Out of Our Past*, the interpretation of the New Deal to which Boesche first exposed Obama at Occidental. According to Degler, William Leuchtenburg, and, more recently, David M. Kennedy and Ira Katznelson, Roosevelt brought to the United States lasting measures such as the Social Security Act, unemployment insurance, assistance for the disabled, and regulation of the failed banking system, all of which prevented the nation's economy from slipping further into chaos. As Obama observes, the New Deal addressed the scandal of child labor, established the forty-hour work week and the minimum wage, and provided unprecedented support for unionization.<sup>39</sup>

Such steps were intended, in the words of Roosevelt that Obama endorses, to ensure "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear." Although accomplishing

all of that took not just a couple of years but most of Roosevelt's four terms in office, and necessitated very skillful negotiating with adversaries within as well as outside his own party, the accomplishments of the New Deal nevertheless fell far short of Roosevelt's ultimate goals, encapsulated in the second bill of rights that he announced in his 1944 State of the Union Address and on which he successfully campaigned for reelection that year. But these programs did establish a precedent, the legitimacy of social provision, which enabled later generations to extend those principles and expand the range of Americans covered by those programs. Obama reports in *The Audacity of Hope* that he carried with him similar aspirations as he entered the US Senate.

Having begun with Obama's explicit endorsement of the Puritans' idea of ordered liberty and his portrait of the Constitution as an unfinished project, I will conclude with his arresting observations about absolutists in the American past and present. Writing about antebellum reform, anti-slavery, and the Civil War, Obama explains that our smug certainty about the superiority of zealots such as Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison makes him uneasy about dismissing zealots today. He asks whether, a century from now, such zealots might be considered right, and moderates like himself wrong, a self-consciousness virtually unparalleled among public figures in contemporary America. When Obama writes about progressive reform and the New Deal, he shows his awareness of the gap that separated reformers' ideals—including the radical programs of a comprehensive welfare state proclaimed in Roosevelt's 1944 Second Bill of Rights—from what they were able to achieve given the nature of American democratic politics. He distances himself from the universalism of the mid-twentieth century, the universalism that fueled the United Nations and the civil rights movement and that shaped his mother's and her parents' staunch liberal sensibilities. Obama notes that they embraced what he calls "a useful fiction, one that haunts me no less than it haunted my family." For those who embraced that universalism, characterizing it as a "fiction" that "haunts"<sup>40</sup> him rather than an ideal that inspires him seems strange. But historians, alert to the distance between some Americans' dogmatism and others' historicism and perspectivalism, should see that such comments indicate the depth of the chasm that separates Obama from his predecessors.

Obama's commitments to a skeptical strain of Christianity and to his ideals of autonomy, equality, and deliberative democracy—to building support slowly, gradually, through compromise and painstaking consensus building—fit together as a coherent world view. As a political strategy, though, they are risky. As his first term showed, betting on the willingness of his opponents to meet him halfway was a gamble he lost again and again. But that strategy is not a sign of weakness, as his critics on the right and left allege. It shows instead that he understands not only the contingency of cultural values but also how the nation's

political system was designed to work. Democracy means struggling with differences, then achieving provisional agreements, whether on health care, economic regulation, or the federal budget, that immediately spark new disagreements. Only autocrats enjoy the luxury of vanquishing their opponents. That luxury is unavailable, by design, in the United States. Obama's inclination—and ability—to reconcile differences has distinguished him from an early age. Observers usually attribute this quality to his character or his temperament, but there is more to it than that simple description suggests. His predilection to conciliate whenever possible is grounded in his understanding of the history of American thought, culture, and politics. Given so many Americans' impatience with opposition to their own beliefs, conciliators are out of fashion. Given our culture's almost automatic impulse to brand compromise as cowardice, Obama's steely commitment to comity is rarely identified for what it is, a sign of principle. It is grounded neither in his personality, nor in calculations of what will work politically; it derives instead from the traditions of Christianity, civic republicanism, deliberative democracy, and late twentieth-century anti-foundationalism that he embraces. Obama's analysis of the history of American progressive politics lies beneath his conviction that reconciling differences contributes more to contemporary democratic culture than exacerbating conflicts. Midway through his second term, his allies on the left continue urging him to stop trying to compromise with his foes. His critics on the right keep taunting him as spineless because he continues to say he wants to find common ground with them. If our deeply divided culture turns away from Obama's strategy, we will find ourselves at a standstill, paralyzed by our dogmas into betraying the principles of our democracy.

## Notes

1. My argument in this essay draws on James T. Kloppenberg, *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). Obama's fullest expressions of his ideas come in his books *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*, 2nd ed. (1995; New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004); and *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 2006). A few cranks have challenged Obama's authorship of these books, in part because he thanks twenty-four associates for their help. By that standard, my own book *Reading Obama* should be even more vulnerable to criticism, since I acknowledge the help of five times as many friends and colleagues who contributed to the process of writing the book. But no one who knows Obama, and no serious scholar, doubts that he wrote both books. Not only do the books bear the unmistakable stamp of his own prose style, both emerged from long stretches of hard labor. At those times, Obama's co-workers repeatedly urged (or chided) him to finish writing and get back to what they wanted him to do, whether members of his Chicago law firm, as he was writing *Dreams*, or staffers in his Washington Senate office, as he was writing *Audacity*. David Remnick, whose biography *The Bridge: The Life and Rise of Barack Obama* (New York: Knopf, 2010) is the best study of Obama published so far, points out that when

- Frederick Douglass published his own autobiography, it came armored with prefaces from William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips attesting to Douglass's authorship. As Remnick notes drily, "A century and a half later, thinking a degree of racial progress had been achieved, Barack Obama and his publisher had not thought to collect such endorsements" (255). Concerning *Audacity*, Remnick quotes a Senate aide who told him Obama's "whole soul went into it, so there was less of him to go around elsewhere." The book was "a way to think through who he was and what he stood for" (444–445). Other Senate staffers have confirmed that judgment to me. Although Obama consulted widely with specialists while writing the book, as all responsible writers do, *Audacity* is, like *Dreams*, his book.
2. John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, February 24, 1819, in *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, ed. Lest J. Cappon (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 534–535.
  3. Two brilliant studies of the paradoxical and frequently misunderstood consequences of this aspect of Puritanism are J. S. Maloy, *The Colonial Origins of American Democratic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and David D. Hall, *A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England* (New York: Knopf, 2011).
  4. Recent studies stressing the popular origins of the Revolution include Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Viking, 2005); and Benjamin L. Carp, *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). On the Loyalists, see Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: The Loss of America and the Remaking of the British Empire* (New York: Harper, 2011), for a persuasive account of the Loyalists' residual resistance to imperial authority and their insistence on individual rights. Jasanoff shows that they carried the American "contagion of liberty" with them no matter where they ended up in the British empire.
  5. On this theme see James T. Kloppenberg, "Tocqueville, Mill, and the American Gentry," *La Revue Tocqueville/The Tocqueville Review* 27, 2 (2006): 351–379. Examples of the conservative critique of egalitarianism as un-American include Dinesh D'Souza, *The Roots of Obama's Rage* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2010); and Tommy Newberry, *The War on Success: How the Obama Agenda Is Shattering the American Dream* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2010).
  6. See Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
  7. The most recent study of these ideas is Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). On the resurgence of pragmatism in the late twentieth century, see the essays in *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture*, ed. Morris Dickstein (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). On the role of these ideas in shaping Obama's sensibility, see Kloppenberg, *Reading Obama*, pp. 36–149.
  8. On Obama's childhood see David Remnick, *The Bridge: The Life and Rise of Barack Obama* (New York: Knopf, 2010); Dinesh Sharma, *Barack Obama in Hawai'i and Indonesia: The Making of a Global President* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO/Praeger, 2011); and David Maranis, *Barack Obama: The Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012).
  9. Drew Friedman's inspired image of Obama appeared on the cover of *The New Yorker* on January 26, 2009. On this theme, and on Obama's debts to American philosophical pragmatism, see also Trygve Throntveit, "The Audacity of Pragmatism: William James, Barack Obama, and the American Deliberative Tradition," in *Revisioning William James*, ed. Miriam Strube (Heidelberg: Verlag Winter, 2012).
  10. For insight into Obama's guide to American and European history and philosophy while an undergraduate at Occidental, see Roger Boesche, *The Strange Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); and Boesche, *Tocqueville's Road Map* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2006). For an overview of the scholarly literature on Tocqueville that indicates the reasons why Boesche—and his student Obama—might find in it fertile ideas for understanding American democracy, see James T. Kloppenberg, "The Canvas and the Color: Tocqueville's 'Philosophical History' and Why It Matters Now," *Modern Intellectual History* 3, 3 (2006): 495–521.
  11. Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*, p. 244.
  12. On the legacy of William James, see James T. Kloppenberg, "James's Pragmatism and American Culture, 1907–2007," in John Stühr, ed., *100 Years of Pragmatism: William James's Revolutionary Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010). On John Dewey, see

- Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Westbrook, *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); and Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 1995).
13. On the relation between Obama's education and his psychological makeup, see especially Dinesh Sharma, *Barack Obama in Hawai'i and Indonesia*.
  14. Obama, *Audacity of Hope*, pp. 13, 262–265. On Obama's Christian skepticism, Jeremiah Wright, Jim Wallis, and Rawls's idea of overlapping consensus, see Kloppenberg, *Reading Obama*, pp. 141–149, 198–218. For a cogent overview of Habermas's recent writings on religion, see Peter Gordon, "What Hope Remains? Habermas and Religion," *The New Republic*, December 14, 2011.
  15. On this issue see Barack Obama, "Why Organize? Problems and Promise in the Inner City," *Illinois Issues*, September, 1988, pp. 27–29, reprinted in *After Alinsky: Organizing in the 1990s*, ed. Peg Knoepfle (Springfield, IL: Sangamon State University, 1990), pp. 35–40. In that essay Obama emphasized the work of William Julius Wilson, whose controversial books include *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); and *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Random House, 1996). For the perspective on organizing that helped shape Obama's perspective while he was in Chicago, see John L. McKnight, *The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterparts* (New York: Basic Books, 1996). For further discussion of these issues, see Kloppenberg, *Reading Obama*, pp. 30–36.
  16. For more detailed discussion of the influence of these professors on Obama's, and the effects of his work on the *Harvard Law Review*, see Kloppenberg, *Reading Obama*, pp. 37–71.
  17. On the influence of the Chicago traditions of democracy and pragmatism, a spirited and provocative (if perhaps overstated) article is Bart Schultz, "Obama's Political Philosophy: Pragmatism, Politics, and the University of Chicago," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 39 (2009): 127–173. Tracing a related tradition more explicitly back to Lincoln is Susan Schulten, "Barack Obama, Abraham Lincoln, and John Dewey," *Denver University Law Review* 86 (2009): 807–818. Robert Putnam expanded the argument from his influential article into a book with the same title, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). The classic statement of the communitarian perspective was Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). On deliberative democracy, the central text is *Democracy and Disagreement*, ed. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996).
  18. Obama, *Audacity of Hope*, pp. 111–112.
  19. James T. Kloppenberg, "Tocqueville, Mill, and the American Gentry"; and more generally, see David D. Hall, *A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England*.
  20. Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father*, p. 437. See also Laurence H. Tribe and Michael C. Dorf, *On Reading the Constitution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
  21. Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*, p. 113; and see Obama's broader discussion of the Constitution, pp. 85–120.
  22. James Madison, "Speech in the Federal Convention on Factions," in Madison, *Writings*, ed. Jack Rakove (New York: Library of America, 1999), pp. 92–93.
  23. Obama, *Audacity of Hope*, p. 104.
  24. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
  25. *Ibid.*, p. 109. On Obama's role in editing the *Harvard Law Review* and the articles that appeared in it during his years at the Harvard Law School, see Kloppenberg, *Reading Obama*, pp. 37–68.
  26. Obama, *Audacity of Hope*, pp. 109–110.
  27. *Ibid.*, pp. 110–111. See also p. 84: "our values must be tested against fact and experience."
  28. *Ibid.*; and see Cass Sunstein, *The Partial Constitution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Marvin Meyers, "Reflection and Choice: Beyond the Sum of the Differences," in *The Mind of the Founder* ed. Marvin Meyers (1973; Hanover: University Press of New England, 1981), pp. xi–xlix.

29. Obama, *Audacity of Hope*, pp. 83–84.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 84; cf. p. 72.
31. Obama, *Audacity of Hope*, pp. 103–113.
32. James T. Kloppenberg, "Requiescat in Pacem: The Liberal Tradition of Louis Hartz," in *The American Liberal Tradition Reconsidered: The Contested Legacy of Louis Hartz*, ed. Mark Hulliung (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010).
33. James T. Kloppenberg, "The Canvas and the Color: Tocqueville's 'Philosophical History' and Why It Matters Now."
34. Obama, *Audacity of Hope*, pp. 21, 4.
35. Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910; New York: Signet, 1961), p. 89.
36. A classic compilation of diverse approaches to these issues is *Progressivism: The Critical Issues*, ed. David M. Kennedy (Boston: Little, Brown and Co.: 1971); more recent analyses include Louise W. Knight, *Jane Addams: Spirit in Action* (New York: Norton, 2010); and, on the obstacles facing Addams and other progressives in search of the public interest, James J. Connolly, *An Elusive Unity: Urban Democracy and Machine Politics in Industrializing America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).
37. On the situation at the time Obama wrote *Audacity of Hope*, see Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez, "Income Inequality in the United States," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118, 1 (2003): 1–39. The best source for information concerning this gap is the website maintained and updated regularly by Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez at the University of California: <http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~saez>.
38. Obama, *Audacity of Hope*, p. 182.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33, 181–184, 209–211; and cf. Carl N. Degler, *Out of Our Past: The Forces That Shaped Modern America*, 3rd ed. (1959; New York: Harper and Row, 1984); William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932–1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963); David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American Public in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2013); and see Cass Sunstein, *The Second Bill of Rights: FDR's Unfinished Revolution and Why We Need It More Than Ever* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).
40. Obama, *Dreams from My Father*, pp. 25–26.