Although liberalism did not receive its name until the early 1800s, it has always been one intellectual tendency of an expanding capitalism. Many of the basic assumptions of liberalism were expressed by the seventeenth-century Englishman John Locke in *A Second Treatise on Government* (1690). He asserted that humanity had originally been without government and was "by nature free, equal and independent." However, people limited their "perfect freedom" by forming governments that would preserve "lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name—property." The rising middle classes tended to favor the theory that the state was not based on medieval, organic values or on the absolutist principle of divine right, but that it was a social compact made with the consent of the governed. The activities of this government were limited, and a citizen agreed to obey only "so far as the preservation of himself and the rest of that society shall require." If a government habitually abused its powers, the citizen had the right of revolution.

While Locke inherited much Puritan political theory, he emphasized temporal consent, not eternal right, and liberty, not power. A simple, economical, and minimal state was expected to maintain order so that the individual might be free to choose his own work, politics, religion, and manner of life. Society should be organized by individual incentives and in-
individual responsibilities. Today we may regard these ideas as "self-evident" and "inalienable rights," but they were once considered radical nonsense. The alliance of the state and individual liberty was not found in the cultures of Rome, Greece, Israel, China—indeed not anywhere until, perhaps, the Renaissance and the Reformation in Europe. Condorcet, during the Enlightenment, was fully conscious that notions of privacy, personal freedom, and individuality were unprecedented.

This liberalism was steeled in many battles to overthrow forms of official coercion. By 1793, Jeremy Bentham argued that "the general rule is that nothing ought to be done or attempted by government: the motto or watchword of government on these occasions ought to be 'Be Quiet.' The request which agriculture, manufactures and commerce present to the government is as modest and as reasonable as that which Diogenes made to Alexander: 'Stand out of my sunshine.' " Even when the necessity of the state was acknowledged, few wanted it to cast its shadow over their own lives.

Liberalism was thwarted elsewhere by intellectual and social barriers, but it became overwhelmingly dominant in the English New World. Here there were no major indigenous cultures, as in Mexico or Peru. There were no institutions or traditions that could powerfully inhibit the growth of liberalism. Although religion might restrict the activities of a Robert Keayne or a Samuel Sewall, it more often reinforced patterns of individual assertion. Consider the case of Benjamin Franklin (1706-90), the champion of self-help and the model American for a commercial civilization. If a man of Franklin's abilities had been born in England, he might have been reduced to being a literary hack (as was Daniel Defoe) or, if he had triumphed, he might have found a royal rank. In America he became a radical republican.

Franklin's developed ideal was a free and educated populace living in a vast marketplace of ideas and occupations. He acclaimed the freedom of American society from elites, political sinecures, and hordes of idle gentlemen ("golden hogs"). He equated hereditary aristocrats with something as absurd as "hereditary professors of Mathematicks." If a political office became too profitable, he felt it should be abolished or diminished, since it might encourage corruption or pride in its holder. Farmers, he thought, were the only people who produced economic value and lived "innocent and virtuous lives." Public welfare encouraged idleness and "compelled the rich to maintain the poor." Furthermore, a state church was rejected as unnecessary and obnoxious, expensive government was repudiated, voluntary associations were endorsed, and the natural course of economic processes was favored over any kind of legislative interference. However, as a practical man, Franklin went no further than laissez-faire liberalism.

When traditional European authority challenged these American liberal values, it provoked a revolution. The British determination to maintain a standing army in the colonies at the end of the French and Indian War in
1763 was largely responsible for the following struggles over taxes, frontier
defense, and the quartering of troops. These new burdens and the growing
powers of the colonial administrators seemed unnecessary with the elimina­
tion of France's power in the New World. Many of the colonists feared the
emergence of some tyranny more than actuality warranted. Disruption of
their traditional liberties finally culminated in the Declaration of In­
dependence, which forms a lengthy indictment of abuses of authority: taxes
"without consent," use of mercenaries, "Swarms of Officers to harass our
People, and eat out their Substance," compulsory support for the Church of
England, impudent and expensive armies, limitations on trade, population,
and territorial expansion of the colonies (including what was considered
favoritism for Catholic Quebec), limitations on trial by jury, and dissolution
of some elected governments.

Edmund Burke properly interpreted the American Revolution as a just
response to the British attempt to impose strict outside discipline and costly
regulation, violating local customs. Grievances generally were based on
traditional fears of the destruction of political balance, especially by an en­
croaching military. While American history urged more local voice in gover­
nance, the colonies shared most of the cultural and ideological assumptions
of eighteenth-century Englishmen. These assumptions were given a more
libertarian cast, however, by American physical and cultural circumstances.
The Americans conducted the war itself with enormous difficulty because of
the absence of a political center, rather unruly military forces, and fear of
imposing taxes (although, conversely, this decentralization meant that the
British had no single capital to seize and won no decisive battles with the
scattered armies).

But even if the American struggle might be interpreted as a defensive or
"lawful" one that demonstrated respect for prescriptive rights and traditions,
its consequences were not conservative. Future liberalism and radicalism were inspired when this nation was founded by subversion, treason, and armed struggle. The successful breaking of foreign, often
aristocratic, ties (such as mercantilism) and many institutional continuities
meant a powerful impetus to our sense of destiny, while conservative alter­
natives to a liberal interpretation of this future were generally unattractive.
A British America might have perceived the colonial Puritans as negatively
as the English do Cromwell and might have regulated the growth of
capitalism or directed territorial expansion within orderly frameworks. The
Revolution destroyed such models. Even values that persisted were likely to
be vitally reinterpreted, such as conventional theories of natural law found
in Puritan teachings in the North and common law in the South, beliefs in
social contract expressed in covenant theology, and the ideal of a balanced
government. These concepts were now expressed in a radical republic whose
heroes were rebels, not loyalists, and revolutionary idealists, not builders.
Separation—the Declaration of Independence—has been more renowned
than reparation—the Constitution; Reformation was stressed, not the church.\textsuperscript{6}

The major political manifestation of this was liberalism, which became the "official atmosphere" of America (to use Keats's term), or the public orthodoxy. As Willmoore Kendall defined the latter:

It is that tissue of judgments, defining the good life, and dictating the meaning of human existence, which is held commonly by the members of any given society, who see in it the charter of their way of life and the ultimate justification of their society. . . . [It] is that matter of convictions, usually enshrined in custom and folkways, often articulated formally and solemnly in charter and constitution, occasionally summed up in the creed of a church or the testament of a philosopher that makes society The Thing it is and that divides it from other societies.\textsuperscript{7}

The defeat of the Loyalists, and the flight of 100,000 to "Hull, Halifax or Hell" (including two-thirds of the living graduates of Harvard), debilitated American conservative thought, leaving few opponents to the ideal of liberation of individuals from the restraints of economic controls, political deference, and coerced religion. Although Kendall, a conservative, did not consider liberalism healthy for community, he could not deny that its pervasive nature in America often required our conservatives to invent their own "traditions" that relied upon Plato, Thomas Aquinas, Burke, or other individuals and movements that were extremely difficult to Americanize.

The liberal republic that was established was part of an international capitalist revolt against regulation marked also by the publication of \textit{The Wealth of Nations} in the same year as the Declaration of Independence. During the coming decades Americans moved rapidly toward the realization of free choice within the marketplace. The franchise was expanded; the importing of slaves was halted by nearly all the Southern states; slavery was abolished by all of the North within a few decades; popular education was soon to be radically expanded; established religion began a rapid decline. The social ferment of the Revolution also prompted some of the first writing that advocated increased rights, or even equality, for women and blacks. The Revolution aroused expectations far beyond its initial goals.

In this sense the American Revolution did not cease in the 1780s but has been a continuing process. It has favored a society of constant change in the direction of its public principles of liberty, equality, and opportunity. Gunnar Myrdal once observed that "America, compared to every other country in Western civilization, has the most explicitly expressed system of general ideas in reference to human interrelationships."\textsuperscript{8} The values it conserves are liberal or even radical. Since the Revolution, this intellectual system has formed one of the primary bonds holding American society together.

Such beliefs have functioned to reduce the need for institutional controls. Immediately after the Revolution, a nearly nonexistent government was
established under the Articles of Confederation. Even the advocates of a stronger regime, however, were amazingly libertarian by European standards. *The Federalist* (#51) agreed that no humans were angels—including rulers—and that governments must be constantly scrutinized for arrogance. George Washington declared that "government is like fire—a dangerous servant—a fearful master." Washington, despite political and military threats from the British, Indians, French, and Spanish, refused to advocate a larger army for the new republic, for he was wary of its tyrannous nature. Jefferson also warned against the "wolfish" instincts of the state and offered the speculation that society without government ("as among our Indians") might be the happiest condition of humanity. Government was rendered dangerous by the negative elements of human character (what Madison called "a degree of depravity") and was generally made unnecessary by its more positive characteristics.

Although the Constitution was reluctantly adopted for the preservation of American property and trade, by the standards of that time it was extraordinarily limited. George Bernard Shaw would later aptly describe it as a virtual conspiracy against power. Authority was divided and subdivided, checked and balanced by every means. Even most of the founders probably shared Thomas Paine's hopes that "the more perfect civilization is, the less occasion has it for government, because the more does it regulate its own affairs, and govern itself." Even when Americans clamored for public subsidies for canals and roads, they violently resented regulation. Alexander Hamilton discovered this when he dared to limit the absolute freedom of the unruly frontiersmen by taxing their liquor stills. He was immediately met by the Whisky Rebellion in 1794. Although the rebels were militarily defeated, they won their goal, the removal of the federal tax.

A version to institutional authority was a constant check on the aspirations of Hamilton, John Adams, and others. Their ideal of a central order was defeated by the intense localism of a nation of small farmers, small artisans, and small businessmen. The laissez-faire liberalism of these entrepreneurs did not glorify the state but humbled it to the rank of policeman and magistrate. The proper functions of government were to insure order and opportunity. Jefferson acquired the Louisiana Purchase so that it might be divided into small farms as a mainstay of freedom, and Jackson struck down the Bank of the United States in 1832 because it was a dangerous monopoly.10

This was the atomized America that Alexis de Tocqueville viewed in the 1830s. There was no memory of a feudal order or of any established in-
ergic aristocracy, and ownership of property flourished widely among the common people. Tocqueville, as a European who was familiar with stratified cultures that encompassed both princes and peasants, readily perceived that the United States was a relatively simple class society in which the bourgeoisie and its ideologies held power. For him, American radicals and conservatives were likely to be Red Liberals and White Liberals—individualist critics and small government conservatives who could be viewed as the right and left wings of a liberal bourgeois order.

But why didn't the infamous egoism of the Americans destroy this order? In Europe, "aristocracy links everybody, from peasant to king, in one long chain"; but in America "democracy breaks the chain and frees each link." Why didn't this mean the collapse of society? When Tocqueville adopted the term *l'individualisme* to describe American life, he realized that, in Europe, the word would mean chaos, selfishness, and antisocial behavior. There the ideal was integration into a community. But in America individualism was honored and each person was urged to depend upon himself or herself.

Tocqueville originally feared that this egoism could lead to two extremes: either anarchy would result or the terrified individual would flee to the security of an authoritarian regime and mass conformity. But he finally concluded that while "anarchy does have a more terrible aspect in democratic cultures than elsewhere," society was held together by its voluntary institutions and mores, and by the secular religion of democracy. The anarchic individualism of America was a necessary element of a complicated system of egos, ideas, and institutions that limited the powers of each element. Tocqueville appreciated that democracy could both give enormous power to some organizations and cause a frequent resentment against that power: "I admire the way equality insinuates into the heart and mind of every man some instinctive inclination toward political freedom, thereby preparing the antidote for the ill which it has produced." Curiously, the antidote of anarchy, found in our "instinctive inclinations" to rebel against authority, could lead to a balanced order.

"Anarchy," for Tocqueville and other nineteenth-century commentators, had several meanings. A European could interpret the absence of any state church, aristocracy, or powerful government as anarchy. A laissez-faire liberal might even argue that the best society was anarchy plus a policeman and a judge. In the almost bizarre words of one liberal politician, Carl Schurz: "Here in America you can see every day how slightly a people needs to be governed. In fact, the thing that is not named in Europe without a shudder, anarchy, exists here in full bloom."

For some, however, the process of liberation was incomplete. What a European or Europeanized observer might interpret as anarchy had not gone far enough for them. Discontented liberals were not convinced that laissez-
Liberalism

faiok capitalism had been achieved. By the 1830s, a phenomenon was noticed that was labeled (somewhat derisively) "the universal reformer." Such a being was reputed to criticize everything on the basis of pure ideals: slavery, temperance, women's rights, moral reform, pacifism, education, and child-rearing. A radical worker like Seth Luther had complained in 1832 that the United States was only nominally a free country, since class distinctions continued to defy "that self-evident truth—ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL." Some abolitionists had begun their assault on the prison of slavery. Women such as Sarah and Angelina Grimké argued that women were moral and responsible individuals who must speak their own consciences and assailed the "lust for domination" and "passion for supremacy" of the male sex. Margaret Fuller further attacked the anti-individualistic abstractions of Man and Woman in "The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men. Woman versus Women" (1843). Elizabeth Cady Stanton modeled her feminist "Declaration of Sentiments" (1848) after the Declaration of Independence.13

These were militant liberals. While their opponents might reply that there was a divine economy in which delicate women, servile blacks, savage Indians, obedient children, and others must be part of a static hierarchy, critics appealed to the democratic goal that the individual should be free to achieve whatever he or she could in an environment of equal opportunity. They were representatives of an American tradition that has challenged such threats to personal freedom as state religion, predestinarian theology, the two Banks of the United States, slavery, "women's place," the Masons, "Wall Street," an elite military, "big business," centralized political parties, and the Catholic hierarchy.

Ironically, these individualist critiques have often been antipluralistic, if not authoritarian. Tocqueville first realized the paradox that American individualism expected allegiance to its general values and could respond with a cohesive intolerance toward real or imagined threats. Alternatives to individualism have often been met with a collective hostility. But even such authoritarianism, usually noninstitutionalized, has been compatible with anarchism. As we will see later, authority exists in anarchist theory, but it usually takes the form of public opinion rather than law, "restraining morals as inexorably as laws ever did anywhere" (as Jefferson portrayed his anarchist Indians).14

The ranks of this laissez-faire radicalism were decimated by the Civil War. Military struggle demanded government expansion and central authority far beyond that of the miniscule federal state of 1860, an unimpressive collection of post offices, several thousand troops, custom houses, and (Europeans snickered) a shabby capital in out-of-the-way Washington. Neither the war nor its outcome could have been predicted: Why should Americans ferociously kill one another for anything so nebulous as "the preservation of
the union”? The Civil War bloodily documented the strength of ideological bonds, which were far more durable than institutional churches (which shattered long before the war), fraternal orders, political parties, or the weak government itself. It had the fervor of a religious war, each side accusing the other less of treason than of heresy—the North “violating” the historic rights of property; the South rejecting principles of liberty and equality.

Emotional and economic forces that were released by the war enlarged the American state. Unchecked by either old conventions or Southern agrarian interests, government officials were eager to subsidize Northern businesses, erect a high wall of protective tariffs around Northern industries, welcome the cheap labor of immigrants (most of whom, before and after the Civil War, spurned the ethnically intolerant and economically backward South), and encouraged the stabilization of the currency and banks. While Americans cheered the heroic completion of a transcontinental railroad and other epic achievements, loud criticisms of industrial capitalism were also heard. Many Americans were irritated by phenomena that they had once considered the ills of Europe: sprawling urban slums near Park Avenue splendor, the depression that dragged on from 1873 to 1877, federal troops violently assaulting American workers, the first national strike in 1877 (ludicrously compared, by some, to the Paris Commune), the last days of cheap Western land, ever-increasing power by trusts and monopolies, mass organizations of the working class, and ostentatious signs of a moneyed elite that included the sudden proliferation of social registers, country clubs, and private schools.

American liberals of the late nineteenth century, with their traditional ideal of the free individual, were sometimes dismayed by such problems but were usually comforted by the thought that social evolution would find solutions without the intervention of the state. For support and solace, they often turned to the theories of Herbert Spencer, an Englishman who enjoyed an enormous vogue in America that culminated in a semiroyal reception during his 1882 visit. There were many reasons for the widespread popularity of his philosophy, which was reflected in the sale of 350,000 copies of his books from the 1860s to 1900. Spencer was “scientific”—nonreligious but not antireligious—trumpeted the inevitability of progress, had a comprehensive worldview, used a simple vocabulary, and had an “almost Anarchistic doctrine of the self-sufficiency of economic society.” In Spencer’s own background were such influences as the Godwinian anarchism of Thomas Hodgskin and the Quaker and Nonconformist religion of his own family.

From his studies, Spencer had concluded that the state was founded during the ignorant, aggressive childhood of humanity, when society was maintained by force. As society matured, however, it became more differentiated into associations and individuals who combined for reasons of self-interest
rather than external compulsion. Voting and politics were often "superstitions" of the past that should not be allowed to alter this progressive liberation, which could produce some magnificent (but at present unknowable) millennium. In the meantime, we should all recognize such universal axioms as self-interest, which requires the "law of equal liberty": "Every man has freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man." All who ignore this "law" are aggressors who ought to be repulsed or censured by the community, whether the aggressors are individuals or the state. Spencer actually entitled one of the chapters of his Social Statics "The Right to Ignore the State." This right existed when the state violated the Law of Equal Liberty by going beyond its only duty, which was to preserve order. He even speculated that the formation of voluntary associations to fulfill public needs might render the state entirely parasitic and worthy of abolition, just as the state church was superseded by individual churches that the individual could accept or reject.

Given these statements and implications, it was fundamentally false for the later historian Richard Hofstadter to state that Spencerianism was fundamentally ultraconservative, even while he conceded the antistatist quality: "it was almost anarchical, and it was devoid of that center of reverence and authority which the state provides in many conservative systems." Spencer's work was not consciously conservative but represented one stage of liberal thought. Furthermore, the ideals of his system presented immense possibilities for what Hofstadter lightly dismissed as "radicalism on incidental themes." As we will discover in the following chapter, Spencerian liberalism had its counterpart in Spencerian radicalism.

However, Spencer and the American liberals seldom drew radical conclusions from their principles. They were content to admit that a limited state was required by humanity's imperfections. Nonetheless, men like E. L. Godkin and William Graham Sumner also left no doubt that it must be severely restricted to preserving civil peace and property, and that a free market should be the essential governor of society, whatever the consequences. They hoped that competition, unhampered by government-sponsored monopolies and restraints, would reach the complete utilization of resources and energies. Yet most champions of laissez-faire were not as cruelly blunt as Sumner, who once remarked that man had only one natural right: the right to make his way out of the world if he could not make his way in it.

Most Americans preferred their laissez-faire aspirations framed with a few illusions, which were provided by Spencer. Others who were not convinced that the future promised an individualist paradise, thought that such might have existed in the past and developed a deep nostalgia for what they believed was a simpler and now lost America. Horatio Alger satisfied this need in more than one hundred novels that glorified the victory of virtuous and
hardworking individuals over institutional barriers. By 1920 Americans had purchased seventeen million copies of this trite but pleasant formula. But many Americans, despite their enthusiasm for a fantasized past, or a hoped-for future, realized that the present required some type of collective action. The Main Street emporium was now stupendously overshadowed by national and international firms, and small farmers were competing with such bonanza farms as one of 75,000 acres in Minnesota that operated two hundred threshing machines. One labor leader, feeling endangered by corporate aggressiveness, cried out:

We are nourishing a serpent, fostering treason, giving aid and comfort to the enemies of society, welcoming an invader, assisting in the overthrow of free institutions and popular government, inviting a dictator, and laying the foundations of despotism. We are sowing the seed of revolution and may reap the harvests upon the bloody fields of civil strife or amid the groans and sighs of fettered slaves, bereft of manhood, wallowing in moral degradation, ignorance and vice, degraded from the exalted dignity of citizenship in a free and mighty nation to a condition of sycophantic dependence upon the despotic decrees of an aristocrat.

Such melodramatic statements reflected—even if they magnified—the real drama of poverty, insecurity, and moral anguish within industrial America. For these critics, the trusts were "Europeanizing" America by creating "trust serfs" who could never be free. Both the demands of such conscience and social necessity began to transform the meaning of liberalism in America, just as the classic author of English liberalism, J. S. Mill, in later editions of his Principles of Political Economy, had confessed that he was no longer "charmed" by the gouging, pushing, and elbowing of the present order and longed for a more structured and humane economy. He moderately suggested high inheritance taxes for equalization, along with more sentimental hopes for producers' co-ops and "co-partnerships" in industry.

In America, Lockian solutions like "trust-busting" and muckraking articles about individual and group corruption were slowly replaced by agencies for business regulation. During the Progressive period from 1900 to 1916, and during the New Deal, laissez-faire liberalism was supplanted by welfare liberalism. At the same time, the dominant varieties of extreme social criticism also changed, with anarchism being numerically replaced by syndicalism and utopian socialism becoming less significant than Social Democracy and Communism.

Today, liberalism is commonly defined as positive intervention by the state. One of the primary functions of activist government is to umpire competition and bargaining between various social and economic units. This interest-group liberalism has been dubbed "procapitalist syndicalism" (C. Wright Mills), "a kind of syndicalism based on organizing, balancing, and co-ordinating different functional groups" (William Appleman Williams), and "liberal-syndicalism" (the Schwendingers). Its goal theoretically re-
mains not the paternal state but the preservation and extension of the "marketplace" of opportunity and competition, whether for blacks through the civil rights movement or for women through the Equal Rights Amendment and reproductive self-determination (the right to choose: "voluntary motherhood"). Both old and new liberalisms preserve what Thurman Arnold once called "the folklore of capitalism": hostility for open class snobbery, limited respect for tradition, desire for constant improvement, fundamental optimism about progress, emphasis on individual effort, and a general trust in human goodness and the powers of practical reason. All of these beliefs have been nurtured by the apparent absence of rigid institutions in a constantly renovating capitalist system, creating the sense of continuous flux and immense possibilities. That this libertarian mythology is not always congruent with reality is a source of frustration and rebellion.

Many tensions also derive from the basic contradiction between the active role of the state and continued resistance to centralized power. Our public philosophy still tends to consider the individual, society, and the state as separate categories and distrusts institutional integration. American politics, reflecting this, is a checkerboard of entities. In the Chicago area, there are 2 states, 6 counties, 10 towns, 30 cities, 49 townships, and 110 villages, in addition to 235 tax districts, 400 school districts, and hundreds of political associations. This division of authority is moderate compared with that of metropolitan New York; a recent book was entitled 1400 Governments. Centralized planning thus is limited even in the modern liberal state. The inability to act "efficiently" because of diffusion of power contributes to further devaluation of government.

Such government must suffer the further paradox of increasing public calls for the state to maintain or create opportunity along with growing public denunciations of bureaucracy. Basic reconciliation seems impossible. Liberation through education has meant more compulsory schooling (and, within that, the teacher as authority, rather than guide). Legislation for equal rights has created imperial courts and resented interference. Regulatory agencies to ensure competition have become adjuncts of the companies they are supposed to regulate. Labor unions that were intended to protect the rights of workers have become one-party, dictatorial bureaucracies. Other social services have reaped a harvest of criticism about the methods by which they were provided.

More generally, there is the paradox that though Americans seem to be an extremely political people, there is popular hostility toward professional politicians. There are numerous opportunities for some "voice" in national, state, city, and local elections, and on bond issues, recalls, initiatives, and referendums; yet James Bryce noticed that the actions of most politicians were not "within the horizon" of people's consciousness. When public misdoing is revealed, it reaffirms the common opinion that "it's only the politi-
cians—what can you expect from the politicians?”

Even the president, who is accorded a certain aura because he is considered the direct spokesman for all the people, is most highly respected when he is seen as “superior” to politics. The bland Eisenhower, the idealistic Kennedy, the bumbling Ford, and the man-of-the-folks Carter have been trusted more than those presidents perceived as scheming manipulators—Johnson and Nixon.

By the late 1970s, left-wing liberalism had lost substantial public support, although many of its detractors were not “conservatives” so much as right-wing liberals. The content of the usual forms of liberalism had become similar to Fabian socialism, and a champion like Hubert Humphrey resembled the Social Democratic chancellor of West Germany, Helmut Schmidt. At this point, both the goals and the means of such liberalism may have changed. Liberation could have been displaced by regulation. Sidney Hook has complained bitterly of the emergence of totalitarian liberalism. The proposals of Senator Edward Kennedy and Governor Jerry Brown for two years of compulsory national service for young adults might properly qualify for such a label. Perhaps the growing public disenchantment with the illiberalism of welfare-state liberalism is also a sign that popular opinion, even if it has often demanded state action, has now come to resent the creation of “big government.”