"Let the People See": Reflections on Ethnoreligious Forces in American Politics*

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I

In a long editorial entitled "Let the People See," which appeared in the *New York Tribune* in 1852, Horace Greeley, the great editor and leader of the Whig party, gloomily evaluated his party's chances at the polls that autumn. He believed that in any work place, a machine shop for example, fifteen out of twenty workmen supported Whig economic policies. However they would not vote for the party. Why not?

> Jones hates the Whigs, because Esq. Simpson is a leading Whig, and feels too big to speak to the common people. Marks has been trained to believe that the Whigs were Tories in the Revolution, and starved his father in the Jersey prison ship. . . . Smithers is for a tariff himself, but his father before him was a Democrat, and he isn't going to turn his coat. Smolker doesn't object to anything his Whig shop-mates propose; but he is a foreigner and thinks the Whigs hate foreigners; so he feels bound to go against them. Pilkins is a heretic in religion, and most of the leading Whigs he knows are Orthodox; and he can't stand orthodoxy any how you can fix it.

And so, Greeley concluded, "for one or another of a hundred reasons, *equally frivolous or irrelevant*, votes are piled up against us — not for anything we as [a] party affirm or propose, but because of considerations as foreign from the real issues of the canvass as is the subjugation of Japan." (Emphasis added.)[1]

Greeley's lament reflected his impatience with such politics, and his refusal to believe in the relevance of any political choice not based on economic matters. Political attitudes, assumptions and values rooted in religion, nationality, history, memory, and prejudice, rather than in a rational, specifically economic, calculus of issues, parties and candidates, could not be important. Greeley recognized their presence but denied their centrality in the political world even when he continually encountered evidence that he was wrong.[2]

Most social commentators and many involved public figures have traditional-

ly agreed with Greeley. Nathan Glazer has written, for example, that American society is one in which "there are no strangers." Despite examples of persistent ethnoreligious tensions even in such advanced western societies as the United Kingdom and Canada, the United States is "unique" in its refusal "to define itself in ethnic, or religious, or national terms, as our basic founding documents make clear."[3] As long ago as 1940, Judge Sam Rosenman capped this attitude in a resolution presented to the American Jewish Committee.

> Differences in religion, race or nationality have no part in an American political campaign. Elections should be determined exclusively on an American basis rather than on the basis of the alleged separate interests of any religious or racial group. No member of any religion or any race or any nationality has any right to vote on any basis other than his belief as to what is best for the United States alone.[4]

Behind such denials has lain a particular conceptual view of the world, one held both by scholars and by the larger public. As Benjamin R. Barber has recently written, we live in a political culture in which

> in almost every case, our idea of the political begins with the *homo economicus*: man conceived as a secularized, privatistic, self-regarding calculator motivated solely by hedonistic interests and conscious of the political only by dint of selfish prudence. Our politics, in the blunt reductionism of Harold Lasswell, is thus defined by the question "who gets what, when, where and how?" Right and left may differ on the answer but they concur on the question. Our radical, no less than our conservative, ideologies consequently tend to be secular, material, privatistic, and commercial. To the extent community plays any role at all, it is community held together by prudential justice but not divine order, by conflict and contract but neither fraternity nor patriotism, by economics rather than religion, and by interest rather than faith.[5]

Are such matters as frivolous and irrelevant as Greeley thought and as generations of American historians and other commentators have believed? In the past twenty years, as part of a major scholarly interdisciplinary movement, specifically the interpenetration between history and the social sciences, a group of American scholars, the "new political historians," have sketched an American political landscape dominated by just those forces and influences which Greeley and his successors denied as either relevant or central.

The findings grew out of a different kind of historical research, one based on measuring the observed political behavior — usually on election day — of aggregated masses of voters, considering the way they distributed themselves between the parties, and examining the defining elements in each party's coalition. The research focused on "the whole man in his total social environment and a multiplicity of potentially relevant variables whose mix can kaleidoscopically shift over time and place."[6] When done, its discoveries, with their undercurrent of a persistent prejudice so complex and intractable as to escape melioration, have

been disconcerting to both those who wish to think in terms of class conflict and economic confrontation and to those who think in terms of America's ability to escape tribal conflict. Political warfare in the United States was neither sound and fury signifying little nor a persistent great battle between hostile, competing, economically defined classes and groups.

Electoral politics, at least, had a pattern to it. The American people were intensely politicized, highly organized for political warfare; they turned out to the polls in extraordinary numbers, were steady and traditional in their voting habits, and battled fiercely to establish their different visions of the United States. Only occasionally did a powerful force shake them from their habitual patterns of behavior. Subcultures existed within America with different values, belief systems, and mores, which became politicized under most conditions (certainly in the nineteenth century) to shape the substance and structure of American politics. The particular texture of the political culture was ethnoreligious. There was a wide range of religions, ethnic groups, denominations, and practices in America. The distinctions among these led to different styles and attitudes which came into politics each with its particular political ethos.[7] Groups had been hostile to one another in Europe. They proved to be no less so here. The dead hand of history and the live interaction between groups living close to one another, had an impact on the way masses of Americans defined their situation and acted in politics. In short, the ethnoreligious factor in American politics is not confined to recent days, the Moral Majority, and the Creationists, or to the slightly more distant question of whether a Catholic should be President. It is, rather, an old, deeply rooted element of our political culture. "At least since the 1820s," Lee Benson has written, "ethnic and religious differences have tended to be relatively the most important sources of political differences in the electorate."[8]

Horace Greeley once described Irish immigrants flooding into New York City as "deplorably clannish, misguided and prone to violence."[9] The first point can be applied to most groups in nineteenth-century America — deplorable or not. People lived closely circumscribed lives in small, distinct communities — whether within large cities, villages, or intermediate-sized towns — with, in David Potter's terms, "strong social and psychological forces holding them together."[10] Within these communities a complex and cohesive web of relationships developed that heightened community solidarity and community isolation from other groups. Most of these communities were ethnoreligious in composition, that factor providing the substantial element of community solidarity. Nineteenth-century American culture was particularly imbued with ethnic awareness and religious consciousness, practices, and behavior. Community institutions fostered that ethnoreligious heritage, as well as a deep sense of separatism from one another. As one commentator wrote in 1857 about German Catholics, they "avowedly desire to keep their people apart from Americans with a view more surely to separate them from Protestants and infidels." The Protestants and infidels felt the same way.[11]

At the center of this political world, for much of our history, have been the

parties. They reflected the multicultural bite of American society. Early on, as a community developed a particular political ambiance and stance, its political aspect was associated with a party. People came into constant contact with their friends and enemies through the parties. "Each party represented not a single denomination, but a loosely structured set of denominations sharing a collective central tendency."[12] Each party absorbed and reflected the political ethos of its constituent groups. Each had different epicenters and were perceived to be distinct from one another. As the editor of the *Know-Nothing Almanac* put it in 1855, the object of each party was clear. The purpose of the Republicans was "to take care of the colored population," of the Democrats, "to take care of the Foreigners and the spoils," and of the American party "to take care of America, the American people, and American interests."[13]

These parties did not simply reflect such differences, however. They led battles, as Alan Lichtman has described them, "across the trenches dividing . . . systems of competing values."[14] One of the crucial things about these tribal groups and one of the major reasons for partisan organizations was their willingness, waiting to be energized, to use the government to accomplish their specific ethnoreligious goals. "History shows us that the contest of race and religion is the bitterest of all, that it has ever been attended with the most frightful, terrible results," the editor of *The Democratic Review* wrote in 1855. "Government," therefore, "ought not to undertake to make, or unmake, religious creeds, for any man."[15] That was certainly one, libertarian strain in the political ethos of the time; but another, strong strain also existed, one that wanted to correct, repair, and reform any iniquities present in society. A role of the state was to reflect and impose specific ethnoreligious, tribal values.

In short, Americans did not have proper regard for each other's differences; rather their differences became the occasion for political confrontation as groups maneuvered for political and social advantage through government action. Arthur Mann reminds us that the early Americans found a case for immigration in "the absorptive power of the host society," Yankee, evangelical, Protestant, and in "the adaptability of human beings."[16] But this did not work. Acute group conflict existed in America of a very particular and persistent kind. Beneath the trappings of unity a war went on to define America — a war fought by political armies each rooted in a different political ethos. The issues produced in this atmosphere "touched lives directly and moved people deeply."[17] One issue, a bill, a matter of dispute, or some specific policy, be it schools, temperance, banks, or tariffs, meant different things culturally to different Americans. Such evidence strongly underlines the fact that "cultural politics is not a side show that occasionally attracts our attention with odd issues like temperance and sabbatarianism; it is as pervasive and powerful in shaping public life as the impact of economic politics."[18]

II

Paul Kleppner has enriched and clarified our understanding of this process in

numerous, important ways. First, to continue an earlier metaphor, he elaborates and delimits many of the contour lines on the political landscape. He deepens our knowledge of the role of ethnocultural forces in shaping American politics, most specifically, by expounding the particular importance of the religious belief/style dimension. Second, he emphasizes, more clearly and fully than anyone had done previously, the role of contextualism in affecting the various determinants of the vote. Third, he sketches the particular way in which parties played their roles as constituent integrators of social-group tensions and conflicts, rather than as policy-makers or instrumentalist institutions. Each of these things had been said to some extent before. Kleppner takes these ideas much further, however, makes them much richer, makes our understanding much more complex than anyone before him had.[19]

American politics, from the electoral realignment of the 1850's, through the party stalemate after the Civil War, to the political disruption and realignment in the 1890's, was the product of a vibrant social reality and the political dynamics it unleashed. Voters, Kleppner wrote in his first book, "were more often concerned with matters which impinged on their daily lives directly and which immediately challenged their personally structured value systems than they were with national problems whose direct salience was not clearly perceptible to them."[20] And, elsewhere:

> Nineteenth-century American partisanship was not rooted in economic distinctions. Neither gradations in wealth nor perceived differences in status nor shared orientations toward the work experience were at the core of partisan commitments. Partisan identification mirrored irreconcilably conflicting value conflicts emanating from divergent ethnic and religious subcultures.[21]

He particularly hammers on one central theme: the pietist-antipietist split among religious denominations, as the major shaping influence determining the character of the political world. The partisan cleavages of the era, he sums up, "involved a value-and-interest conflict between Yankee moralist subculture and white southern subculture . . . [and] a religious-value conflict between pietist and antipietist subcultures."[22]

There were some interesting limits to this central thrust of American political life. Kleppner is very careful to remind us that ethnoreligious differences "were *relatively* more important as determinants of nineteenth century social-group cohesiveness and party oppositions than were economic attributes or social status."[23] This is a recognition both that other possibilities existed and that a matter of subtle measurement is involved.[24] Still, Kleppner makes it very clear where his research has brought him.

Kleppner's findings open up another, very large question as well: that of a contextualism which affected and shaped the patterns of American voting behavior. As Philip Ennis suggests, each generalized, defining influence on political behavior "is differentially drawn into political life depending upon the kind of community [present] — its makeup, situation and history."[25] Analyses of mass voting behavior, Kleppner reminds us, "require sensitivity to sociopolitical con-

texts, specific conditions, and historical experiences — as well as economic, ethnic and religious identifications.'' What looked like the same general influence had differential impact on voters because of differences in people's outlooks framed by such contextual factors. Being a Baptist, Kleppner suggests, does not have "the same psychological meaning in all contexts; [the] intervening experiences of the group, prevailing political-structural conditions, in social-structural milieux, and variations in party characters" all have "salience" in determining "specific partisan choices.''[26] Such variations have to be carefully specified and delimited for our full understanding.

Kleppner also reaffirms the centrality of the political parties in this environment. "For most social groups," he writes, partisanship was "a means of expressing and defending subcultural values"; party choice was an act of group solidarity. Each party represented and reflected the shared values of its component groups.[27] Parties were delegates to the national government from their constituent groups. Each party fought for the future of the nation. The character of each was determined by its ethnoreligious clientele. The Republican party, in general, was the home of the absolutist, moralist groups nurtured in the Yankeedom of New England and the pietism of that region's western outposts. The Democrats were different. They were the product of Catholicism, Southernism, antipietist Protestantism, and of certain ethnic groups as well. As one of the Adams clan succinctly put it, they were "Copperheads and curs — their ideas [were] low and Irish.''[28] Public policy emerged out of the particular constituent demands of each membership. The GOP built appeals rooted in nationalism, anti-Catholicism, and positive government action to purify America. The Democrats, at least until the 1890's, fought against such in the name of cultural heterogeneity and in favor of freedom from the coercive restraints demanded by Republicans.

Members clung loyally and tenaciously to their parties because to many they were churches, not cold, lifeless organizations. "Late nineteenth century American parties," Kleppner argues, "can meaningfully be thought of as political churches . . . parties became the secular analogues of churches.''[29] The Republican party was, as one preacher had it, "the *party* of God, the *party* of Jesus Christ," battling "against the party of iniquity." It was "the Republican Church." The Democratic party, in its way, was the same. It is no wonder that a New York governor could suggest in this atmosphere, therefore, that a "nonpartisan is an unbeliever.''[30] Even third parties, including those usually defined as economic protest groups, in Kleppner's view, did not escape this religious quality or the ethnoreligious structuring of their membership.

Professor Kleppner's work completes a stage in the revision of American political history by the new political historians. His research has taken the basic arguments of that group and made them richer and more whole than they were. Their substance is clear, the landscape well marked, and the roadmaps nicely detailed. This is a tribal conception of politics. Despite tendencies towards unity and the presence in our history of a common set of shared assumptions, institutions, and rituals, American social life in the nineteenth century produced situa-

tions in which tribal, not national, mores imposed group standards, objectives and behavior in politics, albeit within a national frame of reference.

Tribes were religious, ethnic, and cultural groups that identified themselves as distinct in some form; certainly they did so in politics. The members may have clustered geographically (they often did), but the important thing about them was their awareness of their common association and of the presence of hostile others close by and threatening. It was a complex tribalism, not always easily sorted out but present and predictable nevertheless. Sometimes the interaction among the different tribes inhabiting the American space was visceral, sometimes it was ideological, sometimes it was the result of specific policy formulations and pressures. The nature of this interaction depended largely on how the ethos of each tribe was perceived or activated within the political arena. There were occasional flashes of violence in the confrontation, but perhaps it is a testament to the power and importance of the political system that the tribes usually relied on it to handle and resolve their conflicts.[31]

III

All of this is quaint and interesting, but has not that world departed forever? Recently, in the *Yale Review*, James Turner cited Professor Kleppner's research findings as "one of the most spectacular triumphs of historical research in recent years."[32] American nineteenth-century politics is now the subject of "a much more subtle interpretation . . . as a form of cultural conflict and accommodation." But, he then goes on to say, "except for a few political scientists, who cares? Unless history has some meaning for our lives now, what good is it?" Certainly economic differences and forms of class consciousness have played a much greater role in affecting the dynamics of popular voting since the 1930's than they had earlier. Still, tribal forces continue to be influential in both similar and revised guises, perhaps with as much commitment to government interventionism as ever. The politics of ethnoreligious differences, of differing sub-group value systems and conflicts among them, are as recent as the latest anti-abortion rally and the most recent electoral campaign. Kennedy in 1960, the Goldwater campaign which startlingly revived very ancient divisions indeed, the revival of white ethnicity in the 1970's and of black and religious difficulties, suggest the persistent quality of these patterns, as does the persistence of an interventionist ethic in the American psyche rooted in conceptions of right behavior. We have much scholarly evidence of this. As one recent study of popular voting concluded, "religion continues to exert an impact on party identification over the period studied [1952-1972]. . . . Furthermore, the connection between religion and party identification does not seem to diminish across groups with changes in socioeconomic status or suburbanization."[33] It can be "openly questioned," another scholar argued, "whether the dual processes of acculturation and assimilation have so eroded the culture bases of ethnic groups that distinctive political styles are no longer identifiable. Fundamental value orientations die hard, and

unless assimilation runs its full course, distinctive ethnic value orientations will remain to act as guides to distinctive ethnic social and political behavior."[34]

In the everyday realm of political activity similar evidence abounds. According to an Associated Press story in July 1980, Ronald Reagan, in trying to lure Democrats to his side, intended to appeal, in familiar language, to "a community of shared values." His people were said to have targeted white Baptists as a group to be particularly wooed by the party in the campaign.[35] Since the election, efforts to, in David Broder's words, "expand the government's efforts to prescribe and regulate individual behavior" have grown. In one story about book censorship in high schools, *Time* magazine again used quite familiar words and concepts. "This is not book burning or book banning, but a rational effort to transmit community values."[36]

Contemporary ethnoreligious conflicts, at first glance, do not appear to have the sharp edges of those in the nineteenth century and take different forms. They may have altered substances, but the role of ethos, rooted in cultural, religious, ethnic, and locational differences, is unmistakable. Tribalism may take many forms, sometimes ones considerably more respectable and muted than those of more raucous times. But it has been a persistent influence despite a supposedly secularized and technocratic world. Science and economic rationalization had been expected to reduce, if not eliminate, "man's attachment to ancient ties of common ancestry, common land and common faith," but such "ties of race, nationality and religion" have retained their importance.[37] So strong has this influence remained that Walter Dean Burnham suggests that "the pervasiveness of religious cognitions in American political life is yet another — and very important — comparative peculiarity of this country in the cosmos of advanced industrial societies."[38]

The idea of a potent, persistent, ethnoreligious tribalism bothers many historians and public commentators. Some have been quick to dismiss its importance or its persistence. Professor Carl Degler, President of the Organization of American Historians, recently argued that "surely the American people are more than a collection of diverse nationalities, classes and genders living between Canada and Mexico."[39] Others have sought solace in the presence and strength of cultural pluralism as the dominant force shaping American history. One popular magazine recently defined America as "a mosaic of cooperating cultures, differing in lifestyles and languages within the broad confines of U.S. democracy and nationhood."[40] Another actually quoted Horace Greeley as pointing to the "fragility" of such forces. In writing about the Know-Nothing Movement in 1855 Greeley said of that movement that "it would seem as devoid of the elements of persistence as an anti-Cholera or anti-Potato rot party, and unlikely long to abide the necessary attrition of real and vital differences of opinion among its members with respect to the great questions of foreign and domestic policy which practically divide the country."[41]

Such comments miss the important point. It is true that the contemporary polarization is not as clear cut as it was. But the realities of American pluralism

have never been clearly dominant, for pluralism was only one, and not the major
force in the relations among the different sub-cultures in America. Certainly,
within the political structure of nineteenth-century America, there was a persistent
battle over whether Catholics, and some other groups as well, would be allowed
here and, if they were, under what conditions. The battle went a particular way.
Nevertheless all of this suggests the presence and power of certain constraints in
the American political system. Given these realities, their complexities have to be
explored. It remains, in other words, for political historians and analysts to get on
with the job of specifying and sorting these out within the general tribal environ-
ment present.

IV

Political historians still have much work to do in delimiting these forces and how
they operated. A full research agenda would include much about the political
parties. The old and persistent canard that they were nothing more than Tweedle-
dum and Tweedledee, with nothing in the way of principle or issues dividing
them, has been laid to rest and replaced by recognition of the vibrant confronta-
tions of tribal warfare. Tribes were joined in party confederacies in a bipolar
political world resulting from constraints imposed by the Constitution. This
bipolarism levied conditions and restraints on individual tribes and required a
continuing emphasis on the common themes that held their confederacies together
against the coalition of their enemies. Coalitions impose the necessity of compro-
mising, watering down, looking the other way about divisive matters. The need to
find a winning formula dictated careful interaction among tribes that had different
priorities. How was all of this done?

 Party leaders were at the center of the process of building winning coalitions
and keeping groups together. They had to become adept at fitting the pieces of a
complex mosaic together in ways which would be constructive for their purposes.
At the same time, they had to be adept at arousing their troops through specific
appeals and visions of the world. How much room for maneuver did they have in
all of this? How autonomous were they of the influences shaping them? How did
they mediate and compromise and operate so as to meet the symbolic needs of
their intense constituent groups? Party leaders in this kind of situation were, as
Morton Keller refers to them, "part tribal chieftain[s]" and part coalition build-
ers.[42] Professor Kleppner is particularly good in tracing the always present,
difficult vicissitudes of the party leaders as they tried to operate within the
constraints of the internal dynamics of the party coalition.

 If the parties were primarily constituent and shaped only by their social
groups, then there is a very big problem indeed. They cannot be generally
responsible and instrumentalist in policy-making but become, instead, primarily
symbolic and myth-reinforcing. Professor Kleppner's findings seem to stress the
inability of party leaders to escape from their tribal delegate roles even though
some tried to do so. His party leaders usually were buffeted by internal social

pressures which they were unable to overcome. They apparently had little maneuvering room or leadership capability. The parties he describes have been characterized by one reviewer as "vessels with neither rudder [nor] crew."[43] The passengers ran the ship.

Professor Jensen has argued that a new kind of party leader emerged in the 1890's, one more cosmopolitan and less bound by the dictates of the tribes.[44] Still, the tension was not completely resolved. Both kinds of party leaders were present, even between 1850 and 1890, and we have not yet fully examined the possible varieties of the leaders' behavior and the possibilities under differing conditions and within various parties. The point is that, for the moment, the question of the constraints on and the opportunities for political leaders to operate remains unclear. Further research and elucidation are needed before the functioning of American political leaders within their specific political universe will be fully understood.

A related and equally important question rising from the tribal nature of parties concerns how, when, and with what effort, voters were mobilized to go to the polls on election day. The American scene was a rich cauldron of simmering problems, ideas, behaviors, and events that were all possible political foci and ones that could affect and be affected by the cultural tensions present. But how were they set off, ignited? The significant factor in electoral politics, once the nature of group loyalties has been established, is this triggering matter. We have to elaborate how campaigns are structured and carried out. What did the parties do here? Was the mobilization the product of the way parties operated in campaigns? Professor Kleppner's answer defines the direction of affect clearly: "These antagonistic political subcultures did not spring to life in response to partisan rhetoric. Rather, the rhetoric expressed the emotional and psychological perspectives of each party's constituent groups."[45] By implication, this leaves little for parties to do.

The question of mobilization, however, remains undeveloped. The stimuli provided by the parties, the importance and nature of campaigns to get out the vote, the reasons voters came out and did what they did, need further elaboration. Were voters stimulated to be purposive, or automatic and unthinking, or a mixture of both? Was the party the translator and starter engine? What was the nature of the interaction between voters and party? Voting was not simply a given but the product of perceptions and actions that often had to be stimulated, or else they would remain imminent, not actual. There is a reservoir of deeply held passions and attitudes, which has to be triggered into political action. Al Smith's candidacy in 1928 and John Kennedy's in 1960, for example, triggered significant increases in religiously defined voting. But such increases were not automatic. The thrust of recent research into voting behavior emphasizes the stimulative effect of the way campaigns are carried on, candidates act, and parties engage themselves. As Alan Lichtman points out, for example, Al Smith met the religious issue unambiguously and directly in 1928.[46] The result was an upsurge of a certain kind of behavior in that election consequent to Smith's behavior. At other times too, specific kinds of

campaign activities have produced specific voting responses. Burnham points out that these tribal issues emerge "under the right circumstances and *with skilled leadership*." [Emphasis added.][47]

Finally, the focus of voter loyalties in a highly tribal but also highly partisan political system needs further elaboration. There is much evidence of the strong, primary political attachment of voters to their parties, first, last, and always, not necessarily only to, or generally to, their social groups, in both present and past situations.[48] It is the party that comes to embody their political faith. They call themselves Democrats (or Republicans) first when engaging in political activity — not Catholics, pietists or Germans. Does such party loyalty change or affect the interaction between tribal groups and parties? Strategies need to be developed to explore this further, since it goes to the heart of how the political system functions and how tribal warfare occurs. In short, once more, questions of the relationship among social-tribal tensions, the party system, and voter behavior remains open for further exploration.

The answers to all of these questions are affected by the other major factor stressed by Professor Kleppner, the contextual element in American voting behavior. This element has profound implications for the study of American politics, past and present. If Americans react to political stimuli or behave in a wide variety of ways due to differences in place, history, experience, and perceptions, then formidable consequences follow. At one level, for example, such contextualism, along with the tribalism already referred to, goes a long way toward explaining the relative, persistent failure of class-conscious political movements in American political history.

As Geoffrey Blodgett has written, "class consciousness and economic radicalism were shallow and ephemeral characteristics" in the American electorate.[49] Friedrich Engels, as quoted by Professor Kleppner, expressed the importance of tribal influences as long ago as 1893:

> American conditions involve very great and peculiar difficulties for steady development of a worker's party. . . . [I]mmigration . . . divides the workers into two groups: the native-born and the foreigners, and the latter in turn into (1) the Irish, (2) the Germans, (3) the many small groups, each of which understands only itself: Czechs, Poles, Italians, Scandinavians, etc. And then the Negroes. To form a single party out of these requires quite unusually powerful incentives.[50]

Yet the difficulty of creating a cohesive party is greatly compounded by the fact that the members of "the many small groups" react differentially to economic stimuli, and to tribal ones, as well. It is not only that each group — Czechs, Poles, Italians, etc. — "understands only itself"; individuals within each group react politically in patterns which vary to some degree from the group norms. The "unusually powerful incentives" suggested by Engels are almost impossible to contemplate or conceive, given contextualism in group reactions. We know from the research of several historians that even during a depression of widespread

impact, a variety of responses, not all to the economic pressures present, occurs though within a central tendency.[51]

The larger implication to be drawn from all of this is that the American people have never been able to see anything whole or react uniformly, cleanly, clearly, and directly to specific stimuli. In recent years, much has been made of the fragmentation and particularism in our politics even in the face of national danger.[52] Contextualism is one aspect of this which has not always been fully grasped. It suggests not only our heterogeneity (something which observers going back to James Madison have recognized), but also how difficult the shaping of responses, reaction, and action always has been in America. This difficulty is likely to continue despite the growing power of the media and other forces whose nature might be expected to counteract the contextual element.[53] Research incorporating these ideas promises a great deal of additional understanding of such problems throughout American political history.[54]

This last matter underscores one final item. Description of the way people choose to vote and the consequent nature of the party system is both useful and necessary and leads to another question directly: Given what we have learned from the work of Professor Kleppner and others about tribalism, contextualism, and the nature of poltical parties, what then is the capacity of the political system to perform the necessary functions of governing? The people rule or, more accurately, vote in our system, but how, why, and for what purpose? It is clear that the nature of the voting system suggests repeated, formidable problems in the shaping of public policy, public understanding of the needs of the polity, and development of mass support for the political system.

Burnham has called our political system a "Tudor polity", one rooted in pre-modern conflicts of a non-developmental, non-economic nature even when problems of development, the distribution of economic resources, and the shaping of economic policy have moved to the center of the national stage. Instead of confronting them, Burnham remarks, we have remained "preoccupied" from the start of our national history and into the present "with problems involving the integration of diverse and often antagonistic subcultures."[55] He further suggests that this misplaced concern and the persistence in our affairs of the dead hand of a history and attitudes long gone, of preoccupation with conflicts rooted in a deep tribal past, opens the way for the hegemonic domination of the system by cosmopolitan elites rather than by the people, with the consequent atrophying of the institutions of public policy-making and political expression. This is followed by the decline of popular involvement in politics.[56] It is a pessimistic commentary based on his reading of present realities and of what the new political history has discovered about our behavior. Moreover, it is a devastating comment on the capacity of the system and is only reinforced by the implications of contextualism discussed above. Burnham's interpretations have not been universally accepted by scholars. Nevertheless, his preoccupation with a system's ability to rule is a necessary one that political historians are only beginning to turn to and consider extensively. It is one more area of needed study rooted in the implications of the concerns and findings of such new political historians as Professor Kleppner.

V

The visions of the new political history have not swept everything before them. That work, produced over the last generation, remains an important aspect of a longer-range challenge to the traditions of the Progressive historians, who so long dominated American historiography with their visions of the onward march of history toward the triumph of the good. That challenge has found great fault with what Christopher Lasch has called the Progressivists' "drastic simplification of issues; synthetic contrivance of political and intellectual traditions . . . [and] strident partisanship," and, most of all, with their commitment to a certain kind of persistent political conflict in the American past.[57]

What will replace the Progressive vision among historians remains unclear at the moment. There are several candidates of unequal strength and merit. As earlier noted, many people remain uncomfortable with the new political history and its findings; they seek to avoid taking into account this new interpretation of the past rather than trying to confront it and proceed from there. But the ethnoreligious findings of this new political history, as demonstrated by Professor Kleppner and others, hold out an entry of greatest importance into the American past (and present). Its insights must be incorporated into future historical research and understanding.

NOTES

1. *New York Tribune* (weekly), September 11, 1852.
2. During the 1850's Greeley was much involved in battles with the Know-Nothings, who made their position quite clear. "Romanism as a political system, is the avowed and implacable foe of independent thought and action, of improvement, and of the rights of individuals and nation" (*Albany Statesman*, May 25, 1857).
3. Nathan Glazer, "American Jews: Three Conflicts of Loyalties," in Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., *The Third Century: America as a Post-Industrial Society* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1979), p. 224.
4. Quoted in Debra Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 213.
5. Bernard R. Barber, "Review of Glen Tinder, *Community*," in *The New Republic* (June 28, 1980), p. 34. See also, Murray Friedman, "Religion and Politics in the Age of Pluralism," *Publius* 10 (Summer 1980): 45–75.
6. Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties, Michigan, 1827–1861* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 9.
7. The classic volumes in the new political history include: Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Formisano, *Birth of Mass Parties*; Michael Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Forming of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848–1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); Richard J. Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888–1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Samuel T. McSeveney, *The Politics of Depression: Political Behavior in the Northeast, 1893–1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Bruce Stave, *The New Deal and the Last Hurrah: Pittsburgh Machine Politics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970); John Allswang, *A House for All Peoples: Ethnic Politics in Chicago, 1890–1936* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1971); David Brye, *Wisconsin Voting Patterns in the Twentieth Century, 1900–1950* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979); Robert Kelley, *The Cultural Pattern in American Politics, The First Century* (New York: Knopf, 1979); and Joel H. Silbey, *et al.*, *The History of American Electoral Behavior* (Princeton: Princeton University

Press, 1978). Many seminal articles are included in Joel H. Silbey and Samuel T. McSeveney, eds., *Voters, Parties and Elections* (Waltham, Mass.: Xerox College Publishing, 1971).

   Important articles describing and assessing the movement include: Robert Swierenga, "Ethnocultural Political Analysis: A New Approach to American Ethnic Studies," *Journal of American Studies* 5 (April 1971): 59–79; Samuel T. McSeveney, "Ethnic Groups, Ethnic Conflicts, and Recent Quantitative Research in American Political History," *International Migration Review* 7 (Spring 1973): 14–33; Richard L. McCormick, "Ethno-cultural Interpretations of Nineteenth-Century American Voting Behavior," *Political Science Quarterly* 89 (June 1974): 351–77; and Allan G. Bogue, "The New Political History in the 1970s," in Michael G. Kammen, ed., *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 231–51.

 8. Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, p. 165.
 9. Samuel P. Hays, "Political Parties and the Community-Society Continuum," in William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham, *The American Party Systems*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 158.
10. Arthur Mann, *The One and the Many: Reflections on the American Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 73.
11. Quoted in Coleman J. Barry, *The Catholic Church and German-Americans* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1953), p. 11.
12. Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853–1892: Parties, Voters and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 197.
13. *The Know-Nothing Almanac for 1855* (New York: DeWitt & D., 1855), p. 26.
14. Allan J. Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics: The Presidential Election of 1928* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 10.
15. *The Democratic Review* (October 1855), p. 342; and (January 1856), p. 11.
16. Mann, *One and the Many*, p. 73.
17. Hays, "Political Parties," p. 158.
18. Kelley, *Cultural Pattern in American Politics*, pp. 265–66.
19. Kleppner's two books are, of course, *The Third Electoral System*; and *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850–1900* (New York: Free Press, 1970). I am also dealing here with two articles of his in anthologies: "From Ethnoreligious Conflict to 'Social Harmony': Coalitional and Party Transformations in the 1890s," in Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., *Emerging Coalitions in American Politics* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1978); and "The Greenback and Prohibition Parties," in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., ed., *History of U.S. Political Parties*, vol. 2, *1549–1696* (New York: Chelsea House, 1973); and with an unpublished paper kindly shown to me by Professor Kleppner (and written with Stephen C. Baker), "The Impact of Depressions on Mass Political Behavior: The United States in the 1870s, the 1890s, and the 1930s."
20. Kleppner, *Cross of Culture*, p. 18.
21. Kleppner, *Third Electoral System*, p. 144.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 58. The dust jacket of this book reminds us that Kleppner's work challenges "the liberal-rationalist assumptions that have dominated political history."
23. *Ibid.*, p. 371.
24. As Allan Bogue has written, "the challenge of modern research lies in assigning the proper weights to a number of independent variables rather than in the admission that there is more than one" ("Billington's *Frederick Jackson Turner*: An Essay Review," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 64 (October 1973): 177.
25. Philip Ennis, "The Contextual Dimension in Voting," in William N. McPhee and William A. Glaser, *Public Opinion and Congressional Elections* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1962), p. 184.
26. Kleppner, *Third Electoral System*, pp. 369–70.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 367.
28. Dale Baum, "The Political World of Massachusetts Radicalism: Voting Behavior and Ideology in the Civil War Party System, 1854–1872," (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1978), p. 353.
29. Kleppner, *Third Electoral System*, pp. 196–97.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 328; Kleppner, "From Ethnoreligious Conflict to 'Social Harmony'," p. 53; and Richard L. McCormick, "Shaping Republican Strategy: Political Change in New York State, 1893–1910," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1976), p. 241.

31. On outbreaks of violence, see Michael Feldberg, *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study of Ethnic Conflict* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1975).
32. James Turner, "Recovering the Uses of History," *Yale Review* (Winter 1981), p. 223.
33. Joan L. Fee, "Religion, Ethnicity and Class in American Electoral Behavior," in William J. Crotty, ed., *The Party Symbol: Readings on Political Parties* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1980), p. 271.
34. Dale C. Nelson, "Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status as Sources of Participation: The Case for Ethnic Political Culture," *American Political Science Review* 73 (December 1979): 1026–27.
35. See especially, Walter Dean Burnham, "American Voting Behavior and the 1964 Election," in Silbey and McSeveney, *Voters, Parties and Elections*, pp. 366–95; and *Time*, July 21, 1980, p. 9. The Associated Press story is in *The Ithaca Journal*, July 11, 1980.
36. David Broder, in *The Guardian Weekly*, December 14, 1980, p. 17; and *Time*, January 19, 1981, p. 86.
37. Mann, *One and the Many*, pp. 17–18.
38. Burnham, "The 1980 Earthquake: Realignment, Reaction, or What?" in Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *The Hidden Election: Politics and Economics in the 1980 Presidential Campaign* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), p. 106.
39. Mann, *One and the Many*, p. 44; and *Time*, July 7, 1980, p. 23.
40. *U.S. News and World Report*, July 7, 1980, p. 33.
41. Burnham, "American Politics in the 1980s," *Dissent* 27 (Spring 1980): 150.
42. Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 35.
43. Richard F. Schier, "Review of Lipset, *Emerging Coalitions*," *American Political Science Review* 74 (March 1980): 205.
44. Richard J. Jensen, "Armies, Ad-Men and Crusaders: Types of Interparty Election Campaigns," *The History Teacher* 2 (January 1969): 33–50; and *idem, Winning of the Midwest*.
45. Kleppner, *Third Electoral System*, p. 142.
46. Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*. On more recent times, see Benjamin Page, *Choices and Echoes in Presidential Elections* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
47. Burnham, "American Politics in the 1980s," p. 150.
48. See, of course, Angus Campbell *et al., The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960), and the vast literature it has spawned.
49. Geoffrey Blodgett, "A New Look at the American Gilded Age," *Historical Reflections* 1 (Winter 1974): 235. One might ask where economic differences fit into such politics, under what conditions, whether they are primarily the concern of political elites rather than electoral masses, etc. It is a question that has to be answered and approached with these other matters in mind and well in hand. For some interesting reflections on such conditions, see Lee Benson, "Group Conflict: A Critique of Some Marxian and Tocquevillian Theories," in Allan G. Bogue, ed., *Emerging Theoretical Models in Social and Political History* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1973), pp. 123–50.
50. Kleppner, *Third Electoral System*, p. 238.
51. See McSeveney, *Politics of Depression, passim*, on the 1890's; and James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1973), on the 1930's.
52. See Burnham, "American Politics in the 1970's: Beyond Party," in Chambers and Burnham, *The American Party Systems*, pp. 308–57.
53. See James David Barber, *The Pulse of Politics: Electing Presidents in the Media Age* (New York: Norton, 1980).
54. For one example of the revision of our general understanding of the structure of voting as affected by contextual effects, see Lee Benson, Joel H. Silbey, and Phyllis F. Field, "Toward a Theory of Stability and Change in American Voting Patterns: New York State, 1792–1970," in Silbey *et al., History of American Electoral Behavior*, pp. 78–105.
55. Burnham, "Voting Behavior and the 1964 Election," in Silbey and McSeveney, *Voters, Parties and Elections*, p. 391.
56. Burnham, "Politics in the 1970s," *passim*.
57. Christopher Lasch, "On Richard Hofstadter," *New York Review of Books* 20 (March 8, 1973): 12.