Spiritual Weapons
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Emilio Gentile
To: Richard L. Gunn for his 90th
    Melinda for her 50th
    & Caroline for her 20th
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In 1967, as the Vietnam War was fast turning into America’s national nightmare, the sociologist Robert Bellah published “Civil Religion in America,” a short article for general readers that at once sought to describe the country’s common faith and summon its citizens to a higher calling. Drawing on Rousseau’s famous discussion of civil religion at the end of the Social Contract, Bellah claimed that there was in fact “an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America” that existed alongside of but separate from “the churches.” It possessed its shrines and sacred texts, its rituals and saints, but above all its high theistic ideals. At a dark time in the nation’s history, Bellah urged a reanimation of these better angels of the nation’s nature.

Four decades later, Jeremy Gunn has written what amounts to a riposte to Bellah’s optimistic assessment. Where Bellah saw a noble if troubled national faith transcending particular theologies, Gunn postulates a darker creed, an American National Religion forged during the Cold War and still with us today. In Gunn’s vision, this religion is a stool with three legs, supported equally by governmental theism, devotion to a military “second to none,” and a doctrinaire commitment to capitalism as freedom. Citing chapter and verse, he shows how each article of faith was assembled into an ideological construct that has been no easier to challenge in the midst of national disillusionment with the post-September 11 war in Iraq than it was during the Cold War at its height.

The governmental theism of the postwar period may be the best known of the three spiritual legs. Rarely, however, have its components been sketched so well or put together in such a compelling way. From the enunciation of the centrality of “faith” by the leading politicians of the day to the application of “God” to any and all available coins and pledges, there is no question that America was determined to cast the conflict with communism as a religious crusade.
Less familiar but no less important are the two other legs. The traditional American view of its military might was in line with the founders’ anxiety about standing armies. Demilitarization was understood as the proper response to the end of a war, and that attitude prevailed in the wake of World War II. But with the onset of the Cold War, the American public—supported by mainstream American religion—came to accept military mobilization as a permanent feature of national identity. Similarly, Americans in the age of industrialization had maintained an attitude of considerable ambivalence towards untrammeled capitalist enterprise, and in this they were not merely joined but led by mainstream clergy. But the struggle against communism shoved the ambivalence decisively aside. Thanks to an unlikely alliance of free-market capitalist economists and religious conservatives, a powerful spiritual link was for the first time forged between the American ideal of freedom and the country’s economic system.

Having traced the emergence of this new American National Religion, Gunn turns his attention to its deployment abroad. One chapter shows how the United States made use of all three spiritual weapons in overthrowing the Arbenz government in Guatemala in 1954. This is followed by an examination of the origins of U.S. involvement in Vietnam that casts important light on the generally unrecognized religious dimensions of that conflict. In light of American difficulties in coming to terms with the role of Islam in the contemporary world, it is important to be reminded of the extent to which the desire to capitalize on Catholic anticommunism, and an inability to reckon with Buddhism, led the United States into tragic miscalculations in Southeast Asia.

Spiritual Weapons is thus an invaluable historical survey that is also a tract for our times. By positing the existence of a national religion that has never been conceived in this way, Gunn obliges readers to rethink some of the basic assumptions that have guided American foreign policy—and, indeed, American society as a whole—for six decades. Whether, in the wake of the Iraq War, the United States alters these assumptions in a way that it chose not do after Vietnam, there can be little question that the rethinking is necessary. Poised as the nation is on the threshold of a new global era, questions of national religiosity, military hegemony, and the regulation of economic power cannot be avoided. The alternative is to march into the future with blinders on.

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Launching Spiritual Weapons

Spiritual weapons . . . forever will be our country’s most powerful resource, in peace or war.

—President Dwight D. Eisenhower
Flag Day, 1954

We must always make spiritual values our main line of defense.

—President Harry S. Truman
Good Friday Proclamation, March 13, 1948

Long ago we asserted a great principle on this continent: that men are, and of right ought to be, free. Now we are called upon to defend that right against the mightiest forces of evil ever assembled under the sun. This is a time to think, a time to feel, a time to pray.

—Senator Adlai Stevenson
Presidential campaign speech, 1952

Our spiritual strength is our greatest advantage over those who are trying to enslave the world.

—Vice President Richard M. Nixon
Live television broadcast, February 1, 1953

I like to believe we are living today in the spirit of the Christian religion. I like also to believe that as long as we do so, no great harm can come to our country.

—Chief Justice Earl Warren
Presidential Prayer Breakfast, February 4, 1954
Flag Day 1954

On Monday morning, June 14, 1954—Flag Day in the United States—the temperature was already approaching 90 degrees in Washington, D.C. when President Eisenhower signed a new law that inserted “under God” into the Pledge of Allegiance. The president’s signing statement dismissed any possibility that the addition of the two words was a trivial matter or that it had been prompted by political pandering. He declared instead that the new law and its effects today have profound meaning. In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America’s heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country’s most powerful resource, in peace or war.6

Shortly after praising America’s newest “spiritual weapon,” President Eisenhower was transported to an underground bomb shelter in an undisclosed location to play his part in a nationwide drill to practice emergency responses in the event of a nuclear attack by the Soviet Union.7

Later on that same day, standing on the steps of the Capitol building where Eisenhower had been inaugurated 18 months earlier, the two legislative sponsors of the “under God” amendment, Democratic Representative Louis C. Rabaut and Republican Senator Homer Ferguson (both from Michigan) repeated in unison the Pledge of Allegiance with its fresh “under God” addition. While the two officials recited the revised Pledge, a crisp new flag donated by the American Legion to celebrate the Pledge was hoisted atop the Capitol building over their heads.

On Flag Day 1954, most Americans had little reason to pay attention to the news stories coming over the United Press wires concerning Vietnam and Guatemala. Earlier that day in Paris it had been announced that Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai was about to appoint a prime minister. Although the name of the new appointee, Ngo Dinh Diem, meant nothing to the vast majority of Americans, he would soon be a household name because of his strong religious beliefs and for being a stalwart ally of the United States in the fight against communism. (When Diem visited the United States three years later, he was so widely known and admired by Americans that President Eisenhower uncharacteristically traveled to Washington National Airport to greet personally the arriving Vietnamese leader who was by that time well-known and popular inside the United States.) On June 14, the press also reported that the West German government had seized a shipment of arms that had been destined for the “communist-infiltrated” government of Guatemala.

Though probably little attention was paid to these news reports from Europe about developments in Guatemala and Vietnam, both countries had featured prominently in recent stories as being important battlegrounds in the global struggle against communism. One month earlier, in May 1954, the French army in Vietnam capitulated to Viet Minh troops at the famous battle of Dien Bien
Phu. American newspapers also had been filled with stories about how the pro-communist government of Guatemala had seized land from American-owned United Fruit Company and was offering to compensate the company with only a pittance of what the land was actually worth.

For the majority of Americans interested in the news, however, the most dramatic ongoing story about communism was taking place not overseas, but in Washington, D.C. just across the street from where the new Pledge was being recited. On June 14, 1954, in the same Senate Caucus Room where the Water-gate and Iran-Contra hearings would later be broadcast, the denouement of the “Army-McCarthy” confrontation was about to take place on a live, nationally broadcast program. At the beginning of 1954, 45-year-old Senator Joseph R. McCarthy was at the peak of his power and influence in his crusade to remove communists from government. But the preceding three months had not been kind to the junior senator from Wisconsin. In March, CBS News reporter Edward R. Murrow attacked McCarthy in the pioneering television program called *See It Now*. Senator McCarthy, the chairman of the Senate Permanent Committee on Investigations, went one step too far by making vague allegations about communists in the U.S. military. The army decided to fight back with its own allegations that the senator and his counsel, Roy Cohn, improperly attempted to obtain special favors for Army Private G. David Schine, a personal friend of Cohn.8 McCarthy’s own subcommittee turned on its erstwhile chairman and started to investigate him rather than the army. The televised hearings, broadcast live by NBC, gave Americans their first sustained exposure to McCarthy. On June 9, Senator McCarthy received a blow from which he never fully recovered when Special Army Counsel Joseph N. Welch said to him: “Have you no sense of decency sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?”

During the afternoon of June 14—day 33 of the Army-McCarthy hearings—Senator Stuart Symington personally and directly attacked McCarthy and his unscrupulous methods. The documentary film *Point of Order*, which was later reproduced from the original kinescopes of the hearings, ends with Chairman Karl Mundt calling the day’s hearing to a close after Symington’s denunciation of McCarthy. The final scene of the documentary shows an unrepentant yet pitiful McCarthy droning on with his rambling attack against Symington after the hearing had ended and while the crowd was making its way to the exits. Although McCarthy was censured formally for his tactics by the U.S. Senate in December of 1954, he never lost his support from the Knights of Columbus, the first organization to advocate adding “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance, nor the American Legion, which had donated the flag raised over the Capitol building in commemoration of the revised Pledge.9

When President Eisenhower declared that America’s “spiritual weapons... forever will be our country’s most powerful resource,” he knew a great deal about what the U.S. government secretly had been doing involving some more conventional weapons in Vietnam and Guatemala. It appears likely that the U.S. State Department had been urging Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai to appoint
Ngo Dinh Diem, a man whom the ruler personally detested and whom the French also despised. Although Vietnam was an overwhelmingly Buddhist country, and although Diem was a devout Roman Catholic who had been living in the United States for several years under the patronage of Francis Cardinal Spellman, many in the United States believed that Diem’s devout Catholicism and ferocious anti-communism was the best available combination of traits needed to lead the struggle against communism in that Asian country. Within a year, Diem turned on the emperor who had appointed him and, with the active support of the CIA, held elections in Vietnam where he replaced Bao Dai as head of state. Roman Catholic Diem received an eyebrow-raising 98.2 percent of the vote in a country where he was already deeply disliked by the majority-Buddhist population.\textsuperscript{10}

President Eisenhower also knew, though the American public did not, that he had authorized the CIA to assist in the overthrow of the government of Guatemala in an operation named PBSUCCESS.\textsuperscript{11} The rebels who would carry out the military phase of PBSUCCESS were scheduled to leave their bases the following morning, June 15, when sabotage teams were launched, equipped with American-financed rifles and artillery supported by CIA airplanes. Already on June 14, unmarked CIA planes were dropping leaflets over the capital of Guatemala, urging the population to rise up and overthrow the government headed by President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman.\textsuperscript{12} Among the other leaflets that the CIA had distributed throughout Guatemala in the days leading up to the impending coup were copies of a pastoral letter issued under the name of Guatemala’s Catholic Archbishop Mariano Rossell y Arellano. The pastoral letter said:

\begin{quote}
The people of Guatemala must rise as one man against this enemy. Our struggle against Communism must be...a crusade of prayer and sacrifice, as well as intensive spreading of the social doctrine of the church and a total rejection of Communist propaganda—for the love of God and Guatemala.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

Unbeknownst to those who read this call for a “crusade of prayer and sacrifice,” the letter apparently was not written by their archbishop but had been prepared—perhaps entirely—under the supervision of CIA officials, likely as part of their pre-invasion propaganda campaign. Though the archbishop had approved the letter, it appears to have been drafted in coordination with Catholic clergy in the United States and possibly with the direct participation of the same Cardinal Spellman who had been promoting Diem to be the new prime minister of Vietnam.\textsuperscript{14} Prior to the air drop over the skies of Guatemala City, CIA operatives had already distributed thousands of copies of the archbishop’s letter.\textsuperscript{15}

Before the 1954 coup instigated by the United States, Guatemala had one of the few democratically elected governments south of the U.S. border.\textsuperscript{16} President Arbenz was very popular in his country where he had recently won almost 60 percent of the vote and where even the CIA candidly admitted in a “top secret” classified memorandum outlining its plan to overthrow the government, that the “Arbenz government commands substantial popular support.”\textsuperscript{17} But rather than working with the popular leader who was one of the few
democratically elected heads of state in the western hemisphere, the CIA chose as its coup-plotting ally Anastasio Somoza García of Nicaragua, a man whom the State Department fully acknowledged was a right-wing dictator feared by his fellow countrymen. U.S. officials justified their plan to overthrow democratically elected Arbenz with the support of self-appointed dictator Somoza by alleging that Guatemala had been infiltrated by communists. The American press and leading politicians—both Democrats and Republicans—were particularly scandalized by Guatemala’s recent agrarian law (Decree 900) that had expropriated large tracts of uncultivated lands and turned the land over to peasant farmers to grow crops. Opponents insisted that the new law—despite the fact that expropriations are a traditional power of sovereign governments—was unduly harmful to American economic interests, particularly those of the United Fruit Company.

The Americans who had been publicly condemning Guatemala’s turning uncultivated land over to peasants to grow crops apparently had very short memories. Fewer than 10 years earlier, the American military forces occupying Japan had forced that country’s government to expropriate large estates and distribute land to impoverished Japanese peasants. In December 1945, only months after Japan’s surrender, General Douglas P. MacArthur issued Directive 411, ordering the Japanese government to break up Japan’s feudal land system (described as permitting “pernicious ills”) and to redistribute the property to the landless peasants in order to promote “democracy.” Less than a decade later, however, in support of “democracy,” the U.S. government helped overthrow the legally elected government of Guatemala in part to return the previously uncultivated estates to their original owners and to evict the peasants who had recently been permitted to start growing food.

Was it the meaning of “democracy” that somehow changed in the seven years between the land expropriation in Japan in 1945 and the land expropriation in Guatemala in 1952—or was it something in the United States that had changed?

On June 14, Archbishop Rossell Arrellano’s favorite Guatemalan military leader, retired Air Force Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, was making final preparations to leave his CIA-operated rebel training base in Honduras. Castillo Armas also was a favorite of the United States, having received part of his military training years earlier at the U.S. Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The trek that he launched during that week in June would soon lead to a military coup that ultimately placed him at the head of Guatemala’s new junta. The banner under which Castillo Armas and his band of insurgents left their bases in Honduras and fought in Guatemala would presumably have been approved by the archbishop: “God and Honor.”

In order to enhance his legitimacy and to burnish his democratic credentials, Castillo Armas held elections a few weeks after being named head of the junta. In that election, Castillo Armas—who had until recently been living in exile in a rebel training camp—won 99.9 percent of the vote, outdoing even Diem’s landslide ouster of Bao Dai. The United States, which acknowledged that the government it helped overthrow in Guatemala had been elected legally and
democratically, thereafter supported the junta-created military regimes of Castillo Armas and the decidedly undemocratic military governments that followed.

The CIA’s operation PBSUCCESS, according to now-declassified documents, did not limit itself to manipulating public opinion in Guatemala. At exactly the same time that the American government was publicly condemning President Arbenz’s “undemocratic” crackdown on the press that he had instituted in response to the U.S.-sponsored coup, the CIA was clandestinely pulling its own press strings inside the United States. On that same June 14, 1954, the New York Times published an article by reporter Sydney Gruson, then in his mid-thirties, describing the growing support among Mexican officials for the besieged Guatemalan government.21 After reading Gruson’s article in that morning’s newspaper, Frank Wisner, the head of CIA’s clandestine operations (which included the Guatemalan operation PBSUCCESS and a new CIA base named the Saigon Military Mission), telephoned CIA Director Allen Dulles to criticize the journalist—apparently for hinting that the United States might be involved in efforts to destabilize Arbenz. After making the call, Wisner followed up with a (now-declassified) memorandum recommending that Dulles complain personally about Gruson’s article to New York Times publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger. CIA Director Dulles had at least once before complained about Gruson, which had led the Times to transfer him to Mexico City.22 Unfortunately, from the CIA’s perspective, the transfer did not stop Gruson from reporting on Guatemala. Wisner hoped that another call by the CIA director to the Times publisher would accomplish that.

Wisner enclosed with his memorandum to Dulles a copy of a ghostwritten article about Guatemala that the CIA had prepared for Time magazine to publish. Wisner thought that Dulles should convey to publisher Sulzberger the contents of the ghostwritten article but not give him a copy—as that would alert the New York Times publisher to the fact that the CIA had been the real author of the Time magazine piece.23 Meanwhile, in Guatemala City, U.S. Ambassador John Peurifoy, who was deeply involved in the PBSUCCESS operation, called upon foreign reporters to revise their coverage of ongoing events after which they “all agreed to drop words such as ‘invasion.’”24 But an “invasion” it was.

Henry Luce’s Time magazine, including its issue dated June 14, 1954, was reporting on events in Guatemala in a way that was much more congenial to its readers at the CIA. The June 14 article in Time about Guatemala bore the unsubtle title (referring not to the armed rebels preparing a coup, but to the government of Guatemala): “Terror at Home.” The article made it clear that President Jacobo Arbenz’s government was “pro-Communist.” The magazine scoffed at the government’s clumsy efforts to alarm its citizens by claiming that the United States was preparing an invasion that—unbeknownst to Time and its readers—just happened to be true. The Time article smugly questioned President Arbenz’s motives and his rationality in talking about a coup by reporting that the “plot, whether real or fancied, was convenient” and thereby implied that the
emergency defense measures by Arbenz were a mere pretext for his real interest, which was to suppress political dissent in his country.²⁵

Events that followed June 14 would prove to have devastating effects on the history of the countries involved. More than 200,000 Guatemalans—mostly Mayans—would later be murdered by death squads principally sponsored by the military governments that succeeded Castillo Armas—as was concluded by an international investigative team endorsed by the Guatemalan government several years later.²⁶ Many of the 200,000 murdered Guatemalans were killed by weapons imported with the support of the military governments’ principal ally in the struggle against communism: the United States of America. In Vietnam, between one and two million Vietnamese people would be killed in the struggle between the American-supported government in the south and the communist-supported government of the north.

While many Americans who lived through the late 1960s and early 1970s have painful memories of domestic conflicts over the Vietnam War, they are largely unaware of (or perhaps choose to ignore) the devastation that befell some of the countries that the United States led into the battle against communism. Whether or not they are aware of the consequences of American actions abroad, they are fully aware that their Pledge of Allegiance declares that the United States is one nation “under God,” even if they do not know that the two words were added on Flag Day in 1954.

Three Components of an “American National Religion”

The research for this book began with an inquiry into the extent to which religion in America might have influenced U.S. foreign policy.²⁷ The project of the book was originally proposed when it was imagined by many that President George W. Bush’s religious beliefs influenced his decision to invade Iraq in 2003. President Bush was widely cited as having claimed to be acting under a divine mandate. Some of the supporters of President Bush and the war, presumably a minority, enthusiastically drew links between the impending war in Iraq and the biblical battle of Armageddon. This excited end-of-the-world talk prompted concern at home and abroad about the reasons that the majority of Americans supported the war and many wondered whether President Bush himself had been influenced by the Armageddon scenario.

Questions about the possible influence of religion on setting and sustaining U.S. foreign policy arise not only in regard to supporting wars but to opposing military action abroad. To what extent, it could be asked, did religious opposition to the war in Vietnam or the 1980s sanctuary movement’s opposition to President Reagan’s support of the Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s affect decisionmakers? Other questions about the influence of religion on foreign policy arise with regard to widespread Jewish support of the State of Israel and the stalwart support that many American evangelicals have given to some Israeli policies that are very unpopular internationally. But as the study developed,
questions began to arise that pointed in a completely different direction. The principal question changed from “What influence (if any) has American religion had on U.S. foreign policy?” to “Did U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War influence religious worldviews in America?” Once the question was reformulated, or perhaps even turned on its head, the pieces began to fall into place. As I conducted my research in the foreign policy records of the United States, declassified records of the Central Intelligence Agency, and writings in the American press, it seemed less as if I were uncovering some deeply hidden secret and more as if blinders had fallen off and I was seeing what is staring all of us in the face.

This book will argue that shortly after 1947 a new worldview emerged among Americans that was forged by the Cold War and that arose in reaction to both the perceived and real dangers posed by the Soviet Union and communism. If Americans were self-consciously to define themselves in reaction to militant communism, they might have decided that, for example, because communists consistently opposed democracy and free elections, Americans would consistently support the right of people around the world to choose their own governments. But this possible “reaction” did not become a guiding principle as the Guatemalan action in 1954 illustrates. Americans also might have decided that whereas the Soviets repeatedly violated human rights, the United States would take a principled and consistent stand in favor of human rights. But this also was not the path taken. Americans similarly could have decided that they would never, unlike the Soviet Union, intervene in the internal affairs of another country, particularly against the will of the majority. But this also was never adopted as a firm principle.

Rather, the majority of the American public and the vast majority of its political leaders ultimately came to adopt a new worldview that did not place primary importance on American foreign policy promoting democracy, human rights, or non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. Nor did American foreign policy resist the use of military force as a tool to advance its interests. Americans chose instead three other ways in which the United States would distinguish itself from the Soviet Union. Americans came to place a priority on what will be called here the three values of governmental theism, military supremacy, and capitalism as freedom. These three concepts will be briefly outlined below and will be treated separately in more depth in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. They have become components of a prevailing American worldview that I will refer to as an “American National Religion.”

First, “governmental theism.” Because the governments of the Soviet Union and other communist countries promoted official state atheism, Americans decided that their government should promote official state declarations about the importance of God. God would be the “first line of defense” against the Soviet Union. The epigraphs at the beginning of this chapter are telling examples from across the political spectrum illustrating the link between religion and national security that emerged particularly after 1947. For a decade after that year, American political figures promoted one public declaration after another
about Americans’ belief in God for the express purpose of showing just how different the United States was from the Soviet Union.

The United States witnessed an unprecedented boom in official days of prayer, declarations about belief in God, and discussions about the “Judeo-Christian religion.” Moreover, it placed an official imprimatur on religious piety by inserting “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance (1954), placing “In God We Trust” on paper money (1955), declaring a new national motto of “In God We Trust” (1956), and, for the first time, the heartland witnessed a wave of stone monuments honoring the Ten Commandments (beginning in 1955–1956). The promotion of this government-sponsored theism after 1947 did not emerge as a result of national soul-searching into the prophecies of Jeremiah or the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, but as a reaction against the professed atheism of the Soviet Union. Although President Truman had issued prayer proclamations before 1947 (commemorating the end of the war in Europe, the end of the war in Japan, and the death of President Roosevelt), after 1947 and the onset of the Cold War, Truman’s proclamations became increasingly more frequent and increasingly religious in tone.

In 1967, Robert Bellah published a groundbreaking and influential article entitled “Civil Religion in America,” which analyzed some recurring religious themes evoked by American public figures—from Lincoln to Kennedy—to illustrate the historical experience of the American people. While the term “governmental theism” resembles to some extent Bellah’s “civil religion,” there are some important differences in emphasis. Whereas Bellah’s “civil religion” seeks to highlight inspirational and unifying messages that are found in such places as presidential inaugural addresses, “governmental theism” as used here describes a phenomenon that is less spiritually evocative and more politically insistent. The “God” of governmental theism was deployed at Presidential Prayer Breakfasts and in laws enacted by Congress less in an attempt to evoke “mystic chords of memory” and more as a “spiritual weapon” to attack atheistic communism. “God” was cited in the political arena—whether inside at the White House or outside at a city hall dedication of a Ten Commandments monument—not for the prophetic purpose of calling the nation’s citizens to repentance but for the political purpose of throwing down the gauntlet in defiance of America’s enemies at home and abroad.

Second, “military supremacy.” Prior to 1947, Americans had generally opposed standing armies and were likely to see the military as a corrupting influence on youth, replete with the vices of alcohol, foul language, gambling, pornography, prostitution, and, as a consequence, sexually transmitted diseases. Immediately after Japan’s surrender in 1945, Americans demanded a massive demobilization and voiced their opposition to a large military and to a standing army in peacetime. The years 1945 and 1946 witnessed the classic American pattern as citizens became impatient with the military within days of the end of the war for failing to demobilize quickly enough. Between 1945 and 1947, the United States accomplished a rapid—indeed breathtaking—military
demobilization. Weary of war and a militarized society, Americans were ready to turn their considerable human and economic resources towards building houses, educating returning servicemen, manufacturing automobiles, producing consumer goods, and delivering babies. Congressional Republicans and Democrats jointly favored a much-reduced role for the U.S. military. Although some important public figures cautioned against an overly rapid demobilization and while some warned against a looming communist threat, the vast majority of Americans and their political leaders followed the traditional American pattern of abandoning their military in peacetime. While isolationism may never have been as prominent in American history as some have imagined, isolationist attitudes nevertheless returned with a vengeance among many influential Americans. In the two years following the war, American religious leaders, both mainline and evangelical, denounced the corrupting influence of the military on America’s youth. There was little talk in 1945 and 1946 of having broad-ranging military alliances and networks of military bases around the world. Winston Churchill’s famous 1946 “Iron Curtain” speech was initially panned by *Time* magazine, which treated the aging statesman as if he were reliving one time too many the battles of his youth. This antimilitary sentiment began to change in 1947. A new attitude about the importance of having a strong “peacetime” standing army emerged following 1947, and the United States ceased demobilizing and started to build up its armed forces.30

Where the Soviet Union’s military buildup was portrayed in the American press as expansionistic, violent, and designed to enslave its neighboring countries, Americans increasingly described their own military buildup as a means to promote peace and freedom. Freedom was increasingly described as “God’s gift to mankind,” and the U.S. military was portrayed as the protector of that freedom. The military ceased to be seen as an institution that corrupted youth and increasingly came to be perceived as one that turned troubled young men into clean-cut, heroic individuals. Americans across the political spectrum began to declare that the American military should be “second to none.” Long after the Soviet Union collapsed, political leaders from both the left and the right have continued to assume the importance of American military supremacy in the world as if any other possibility were unthinkable. Although public rhetoric would continue to refer to God and religion as the “first line of defense,” American taxpayer dollars would increasingly be devoted to military defense. After 1957 dollars were emblazoned with “In God We Trust,” but a principal destination for those dollars was the Pentagon. Americans praised the Lord but purchased the ammunition.

*Third, “capitalism as freedom.”* From the beginning of the twentieth century until the late 1940s, there was a vigorous public debate in the United States about the relative merits of capitalism, socialism, and communism. Although there never was a socialist majority in America, during the first half of the twentieth century, many prominent Americans nevertheless eschewed the label “capitalist,” which was widely seen as a term of opprobrium. None other than Herbert Hoover
refused to label himself a “capitalist” or to use the word “capitalism” to describe his economic beliefs. Most academic economists in the 1940s were followers of the theories of John Maynard Keynes. In 1947, the year after Keynes died, a group of free-market economists, notably including Friedrich von Hayek, Milton Friedman, and George Stigler, formed an association (the Pelerin Society) that was destined to help shape America’s view of “capitalism” as being something more than an economic theory that explained marketplace efficiency. Rather it became a moral doctrine that linked “Capitalism and Freedom” (the title of Friedman’s bestselling book first published in 1962). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the United States typically considered foreign governments as friends or enemies more in reference to whether they respected “private property rights” and “the rights of investors” rather than whether they respected human rights or had democratic governments. By the early 1950s, the term “socialism” had become not simply a pejorative term but a term of vilification that was virtually synonymous with “communism.” The term “capitalist,” which had been a pejorative term for many during the 1920s and 1930s, not only gained in luster but for many was blessed by having been first introduced by the Holy Bible. Writers seriously argued that biblical “capitalism” is contained in the Ten Commandments. Without citing any scripture, the most famous preacher of the 1950s, the Reverend Billy Graham, pointedly declared that “Jesus taught the value of private property.” By the 1950s, capitalism and free enterprise were understood by many as a religiously sanctioned economic doctrine that also could be mustered as a weapon of freedom to fight the evils of socialism and communism. If communists were going to promote an official state ideology of socialism and communism, Americans would promote an official state ideology of capitalism and free enterprise.

The influence of the Cold War on American popular culture has, of course, long been an area of scholarly interest. But in my own research it became increasingly apparent that there was something that was more obvious and more hidden than I had imagined. It increasingly came to appear that the Cold War shaped Americans’ understanding of who they were in a way that they do not even realize, and it transformed American ideology in such a profound way that Americans continue to live under much of its spell long after the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989 and the Soviet Union in 1991. A significant percentage of Americans in the twenty-first century possess a worldview that was forged in the wake of 1947, though many Americans imagine, incorrectly, that this postwar worldview originated in the founding of their country.

* * * *

The term “American National Religion,” as used here, is American in the sense that other industrialized countries do not have an equivalent consensus around this three-part worldview. While European countries elect officials and have political parties that encourage the government to promote religion and even Christianity specifically (including Christian Democratic parties
throughout Europe), there are major political figures in those same countries—often popular heads of state—who repudiate (and even mock) governmental theism and denounce those who use religion to promote political goals. While there are sharp disputes in other industrialized countries about whether their military expenditures should be increased or decreased, in no other country is there an assumption so widely shared across the political spectrum that their country should be “second to none” in its military capabilities. While the United States has nothing to fear militarily from its closest neighbors, Canada and Mexico, it insists that its “national security interests” can be protected only when it alone of all countries operates permanent military bases that span the globe. When Americans hear that China or Russia is increasing its military expenditures, the reaction is not that “they are seeing the world the way we see it and responding accordingly”; rather, it is that “we should increase our own expenditures in order to maintain superiority.” While there are of course people in other countries who sharply criticize socialized medicine and “the welfare state,” socialist parties—which do not hesitate to refer to themselves as “socialists”—continue to debate the merits and failings of the systems rather than run from the labels.

While not all Americans share this “American National Religion” worldview, it nevertheless is so pervasive that virtually no major political figure in the United States will directly challenge its elements, and politicians in their differing ways champion themselves as strong supporters of all three components. For example, in 2002, on the day that a Federal Court of Appeals held that Congress in 1954 violated the Constitution by inserting “under God” into the Pledge of Allegiance, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton marched to the Senate floor to announce that she was “surprised and offended” by the decision, and she accused the court of having “sought to undermine one of the bedrock values of our democracy, that we are indeed ‘one nation under God.’” Major candidates for political office in the twenty-first century also do not question publicly whether the size of the U.S. military actually makes the United States more likely to be attacked by those who resent a dominant military power. Nor do they ask whether the salience of the military in American public life makes the country more inclined to seek military rather than diplomatic solutions to conflict. Nor do major political leaders question in any fundamental way whether the American free enterprise system is a moral good. The linkage among human freedoms and free enterprise and free markets resonates across the political spectrum. It is part of the prevailing American consensus. Presidential contests in the United States in the twenty-first century do not challenge any of these assumptions; they reinforce them.

Part III (Chapters 7 and 8) shows how the American National Religion worldview influenced the shaping of foreign policy abroad. Chapter 7 develops the case of Guatemala in 1954, which Americans proudly counted as their first post-war success in returning a communist government back into the fold of freedom-loving countries. After so many countries had fallen under communist influence,
including some Eastern European states and Communist China, it felt good to witness the first successful rollback.

The greatest and most searing Cold War struggle for the United States was the war in Vietnam, which will be examined in Chapter 8. Although Americans had provided military and logistical aid to the French between 1949 and 1954 in their struggle against Ho Chi Minh, a Vietnamese nationalist and communist, the French defeat in the battle at Dien Bien Phu left the United States as the principal “western” country capable of supporting the forces of anticommunism in Vietnam. Although President Eisenhower, formerly a five-star general, vowed that he would “never” send major American combat soldiers to Vietnam (though he would send military advisers), a significant step in the entangling of the United States in Vietnam came in 1954 when American political leaders decided to invest economic and military resources as well as the reputation of the United States in Ngo Dinh Diem. One of the principal reasons, if not the reason, that government officials supported Diem was their belief that he, as a devout Catholic, was better placed to lead the fight against communism in his Buddhist country than any other potential leader. By 1964, after Diem had finally shown himself to be incapable of solving the religious and political problems of his country and after the United States agreed to his ouster, President Lyndon B. Johnson would decide to commit American lives, money, and prestige in a massive military effort to solve the problem of communism in Asia.
Part I

Foundations
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Present at the Creation: The American National Religion

Americans are no longer surprised to hear the president of the United States invoke religion to justify the use of the country’s military forces abroad, as in the words of the following presidential address to the nation:

Our religion is a positive force that impels us to affirmative action. We are under divine orders—not only to refrain from doing evil, but also to do good and to make this world a better place in which to live.

Religion should establish moral standards for the conduct of our whole Nation, at home and abroad. We should judge our achievements, as a nation, in the scales of right and wrong.

We talk a lot these days about freedom—freedom for the individual and freedom among nations. Freedom for the human soul is, indeed, the most important principle of our civilization. We must always remember, however, that the freedom we are talking about is freedom based upon moral principles.

In the world at large, as well as in our domestic affairs, we must apply moral standards to our national conduct. At the present time our Nation is engaged in a great effort to maintain justice and peace in the world. An essential feature of this effort is our program to build up the defenses of our country.

There has never been a greater cause. There has never been a cause which had a stronger moral claim on all of us.

We are defending the religious principles upon which our Nation and our whole way of life are founded. We are defending the right to worship God—each as he sees fit according to his own conscience. We are defending the right to follow the precepts and the example which God has set for us. . . .

I do not think that anyone can study the history of this Nation of ours—study it deeply and earnestly—without becoming convinced that divine providence has played a great part in it. I have the feeling that God has created us and brought us
to our present position of power and strength for some great purpose. And up to now we have been shirking it. Now we are assuming it, and now we must carry it through.

Although these expressions and images are familiar to those acquainted with the speeches of President George W. Bush, the words were not his. They were not offered in 2003 in support of a war in Iraq—as might have been guessed—but by President Harry S. Truman in 1951 in support of a war in Korea. If we read the entire Truman speech (the full text is included in Appendix I) and were to substitute “Iraq” whenever he used “Korea” and “terrorism” whenever he referenced “communism,” it becomes even clearer how similar the themes are in presidential messages that are separated by 50 years. Both Presidents Truman and Bush invoked similar language and ideologies in support of wars abroad:

Religion is a positive force that impels the United States to act.

The U.S. military is a valuable instrument that helps bring God’s gift of freedom to the world.

A strong American military is essential for promoting justice and peace in the world.

The United States is engaged in a great military effort abroad to promote justice and peace.

There has never been a greater cause in the history of the world than the war in which we are now engaged.

In this war we are defending the same religious principles upon which our nation was founded.

Our religious faith is our first line of defense in opposition to the false beliefs of our enemies.

History reveals that Providence has been particularly involved in the destiny of the United States.

God has made Americans strong for a great purpose.

It is our responsibility as a great nation to defend moral values and to fight the forces of evil.

If we hold true to our faith, we will succeed because God will be on our side.

Harry S. Truman, the feisty and irreverent Democrat who was famous for his no-nonsense approach to politics, and George W. Bush, a Republican who repeatedly acknowledged the importance of God in his own life and that of his country, use remarkably similar themes to persuade Americans of the rightness, indeed the righteousness, of the use of American military power to battle “evil-doers” and to bring freedom to the world.

The use of such rhetoric is not limited to Truman and Bush. It permeated presidential rhetoric during the second half of the twentieth century. President
John F. Kennedy, perhaps the most urbane president since World War II, similarly evoked religious language and imagery in his 1961 inaugural address.

The rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God.…

Let both sides unite to heed, in all corners of the earth, the command of Isaiah—to “undo the heavy burdens, and [to] let the oppressed go free.”…

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility—I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it. And the glow from that fire can truly light the world.…

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.

For most Americans, political speeches that refer to the United States as a beacon of freedom and that praise the American military as a force for peace and freedom in the world sound familiar, sensible, inspiring, and thoroughly unexceptional. Successful candidates for major political offices in the United States, whether Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative, do not challenge the basic assumptions that the United States has been and should continue to be a moral force for good in the world and that the American military is a positive instrument for promoting this good.

John Foster Dulles versus Adlai Stevenson

Senator Adlai Stevenson of Illinois and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles were two prominent and antithetical American political figures of the 1950s. Senator Stevenson was a liberal intellectual who campaigned as the Democratic Party candidate for president in 1952 and 1956, but who lost badly to the popular war hero General Dwight D. Eisenhower. During his campaigns, Stevenson’s detractors accused him of being hopelessly naïve about the Soviet Union’s real military intentions, and they argued that he would not be a tough leader who would use force when needed to promote American strategic objectives.

By 1952, John Foster Dulles had long been one of the Republican Party’s most knowledgeable figures on foreign policy issues. It was no surprise that newly elected President Eisenhower nominated him to be secretary of state, a position that Dulles would hold until his health forced him to resign near the end of the Eisenhower administration. Dulles’s sharpest critics portray him as the archetypal cold warrior who unleashed belligerent language against the Soviet Union, who used sanctimonious religious rhetoric to justify dangerous policies favoring
“massive retaliation,” and who was famous for engaging in “brinksmanship” when dealing with foreign powers.

It thus should be fairly easy to identify the authors of the two following quotations, one by the “effete intellectual” and the other by the “cold war zealot.” Both statements were made while Joseph Stalin ruled the Soviet Union with a steel fist. Of Stalin’s many acts of cruelty, perhaps none was worse than his forced farm collectivization that likely caused the deaths of between six and seven million Ukrainians. In spite of Stalin’s brutal record, the first statement argued that:

Soviet leaders today are not as fanatical as were their predecessors. They have made many changes of domestic policy in the interest of expediency. The so-called “communism” of Russia today is, economically, very different from the communism taught by Marx and inaugurated under Lenin and Trotsky. Soviet foreign policy has also changed in the sense that some years ago it would have been justified as fulfillment of a sacred mission to accomplish world revolution. Now it is justified as a practical way to assure the security of the Soviet Union.

Under Mr. Stalin, Soviet moves abroad seem to have been marked by an effort to calculate chances. Soviet foreign representatives have sometimes taken extreme positions, but Mr. Stalin has pulled back and relieved the tension when unexpected opposition is encountered. All of that indicates that Soviet foreign policy is subject to change if it can be made abundantly clear to Soviet leaders that the policy is impractical and will not, in fact, promote the safety of the Soviet Union.

...[America’s real influence depends] primarily on letting our light shine before men so that they may see our good works. The Soviet Union would [in turn] abandon such methods as are being used...and we in turn would abandon methods which seem to us defensive, but which may seem to Soviet leaders to be offensive.¹

This statement, applauding Stalin and other Soviet leaders for not being as fanatical as their predecessors, pointedly declares that Soviet Union is less extreme than it was in earlier years and that it is moving in a positive direction. It argues that the United States can best prompt positive changes in Soviet foreign policy not by engaging in a massive arms buildup, which would be perceived as threatening by Soviet leaders, but by setting a good example of honesty and by “letting our light shine before men.” Soviet leaders should be treated as if they are rational people whom we should trust to respond positively to our own good behavior. Americans are thus urged to understand the complexity of foreign policy issues and to understand that force and threats of force are likely to be counterproductive when dealing with the Soviet Union.

The second statement takes a dramatically different approach. The nuance and the respect for the complexity of the situation that is present in the first statement are absent, and a provocative religiosity has entered into the analysis:

The...anti-Christ stalks our world. Organized communism seeks even to dethrone God from his central place in the Universe. It attempts to uproot everywhere it goes the gentle and restraining influences of the religion of love and peace....

Long ago we asserted a great principle on this continent: that men are, and of right ought to be, free. Now we are called upon to defend that right against the mightiest
forces of evil ever assembled under the sun. This is a time to think, a time to feel, a time to pray.²

Most informed observers would likely assume that the first statement was made by the liberal Adlai Stevenson and the second by the religiously intense John Foster Dulles. But, in fact, it is exactly the reverse. The first statement appeared in an article written by John Foster Dulles in the June 1946 issue of *Life* magazine. The second quotation came from a 1952 campaign speech by Adlai Stevenson. The *Life* article argued that the foreign policy of the Soviet Union could be changed if Americans were to live more scrupulously by their religious beliefs and if Americans were less hypocritical in their foreign policy behavior. Although Dulles recognized in the pages of *Life* the need for continued support for the American military, his recommendation was that while the United States should not give the appearance of weakness, it should *not* build its military into a position of overwhelming strength.

Something happened in the United States between 1946 and 1952 that transformed the nuanced Dulles of 1946, who tried to explain to Americans the complexity of Soviet intentions, into the archetypal cold warrior, and that led Adlai Stevenson to raise the specter of a battle royal between good and evil.

### The Turning Point

On March 12, 1947, President Harry S. Truman spoke to a joint session of Congress and urged immediate authorization for a shipment of $400 million in military and economic aid to Greece and to Turkey to fight communist insurrections. The speech, which would later be known as having announced the “Truman Doctrine,” declared that:

> The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world—and we shall surely endanger the welfare of this Nation. Great responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events. I am confident that the Congress will face these responsibilities squarely.³

Former Vice President Henry A. Wallace strongly opposed the Truman military aid package and the new doctrine promoted by the president. Two weeks later he said that “March 12, 1947, marked a turning point in American history. It is not a Greek crisis that we face, it is an American crisis. It is a crisis in the American spirit.”⁴ In his memoirs, President Truman used the same term as his critic had to describe the consequences of the speech, although he, unlike Wallace, believed it was a positive moment. “This was, I believe, the turning point in America’s foreign policy.”⁵ Dean Acheson, who was then undersecretary of state and would shortly become the secretary of state who would help implement the Truman Doctrine, quoted the department’s historian as saying “All...were aware that a major turning point in American history was taking place.”⁶ This “Truman Doctrine” would later be characterized by Truman as calling upon the
United States to respond “wherever aggression, direct or indirect, threatened the peace [or] the security of the United States.”

Acheson’s memoirs, published 20 years after the event, described the background that led to the speech that caused a turning point in American history. On Monday, February 24, 1947, the British government informed the U.S. State Department that it could no longer afford to provide military support to Greece or Turkey, which were then allegedly under siege by communist insurgents. Either the United States would assume responsibility for defeating communism in the two collapsing Mediterranean countries, or the countries would surely fall to the communist menace. A fateful meeting took place at the White House on Thursday, February 27, 1947. Congressional leaders were called to discuss the worsening situation in Greece and Turkey and were asked to support a significant increase in military and economic aid. The new Republican majority in Congress had at this point planned to cut back on foreign military assistance. Dean Acheson, who was at that time undersecretary, later placed himself at the pivot of this turning point in the 1947 meeting that included President Truman, Secretary of State George Marshall, and leading members of Congress.

My distinguished chief [Secretary of State George Marshall], most unusually and unhappily, flubbed his opening statement. In desperation I whispered to him a request to speak. This was my crisis. For a week I had nurtured it. These congressmen had no conception of what challenged them; it was my task to bring it home. Both my superiors [Truman and Marshall], equally perturbed, gave me the floor. Never have I spoken under such a pressing sense that the issue was up to me alone. No time was left for measured appraisal. In the past eighteen months, I said, Soviet pressure on the Straights, on Iran, and on northern Greece had brought the Balkans to the point where a highly possible Soviet breakthrough might open three continents to Soviet penetration. Like apples in a barrel infected by one rotten one, the corruption of Greece would infect Iran and all to the east. It would also carry infection to Africa through Asia Minor and Egypt, and to Europe through Italy and France, already threatened by the strongest domestic Communist parties in Western Europe. The Soviet Union was playing one of the greatest gambles in history at a minimal cost. It did not need to win all the possibilities. Even one or two offered immense gains. We [Americans] and we alone were in a position to break up the play. These were the stakes that British withdrawal from the eastern Mediterranean offered to an eager and ruthless opponent.

A long silence followed. Then Arthur Vandenberg [the Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee] said solemnly, “Mr. President, if you will say that to the Congress and the country, I will support you and I believe that most of its members will do the same.”

Other versions of this meeting have Chairman Vandenberg bluntly stating that if the president wanted a supplemental appropriation for Greece and Turkey he would need to “scare hell out of the American people.” Accepting Vandenberg’s advice, President Truman spoke to Congress a few days later and requested urgent aid for the two imperiled countries. No longer was the Soviet
Union going to be described as a former ally that was rationally pursuing its own interests. It now embodied the immediate danger against which the United States would need to arm itself and other “freedom loving” countries of the world. In American political rhetoric during the upcoming years, communism was to become the incarnation of evil.

While some important observers were warning of Soviet ambitions, the majority of Americans at first preferred to think of the Russians as allies who helped defeat their common enemy, Nazi Germany. The majority was relieved at the war’s end and was not interested in retaining a sizable military to ward off a threatened communist menace in the east. For practical purposes, most Americans and their political leaders during the years 1945 and 1946 wanted the United States to demobilize the military immediately, turn inward, and focus on domestic issues of economic growth and pursuing the “American dream” and the “American way of life.” Between 1945 and 1947, public attitudes largely reverted to the pre-1941 period.

The February 27 meeting and the March 12 speech may well be seen—whether actually or symbolically—as the fulcrum of the turning point in American attitudes. Important events that would shape the American worldview would rapidly follow one after the other during the next three years. Truman made his “scare the hell out of them” speech in March 1947. Less than two weeks later, on March 21, Truman established a new program to ensure the loyalty of federal employees because “the presence within the Government service of any disloyal or subversive person constitutes a threat to our democratic processes.” The program provided for an investigation not only of those who worked in sensitive national security areas but “every person entering the civilian employment of any department or agency of the executive branch of the Federal Government.” Investigators would consider not only records of proven transgressions but “all available pertinent sources of information” in documents that may never have been verified for accuracy, including raw files from the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), former employers, military intelligence, and the FBI (among others). The query was not whether they were conscientious and good employees but whether their “loyalty” to the United States was in question. Several weeks later, in June, members of the Senate Appropriations Committee sent a confidential letter to Secretary of State George Marshall with dire warnings that there were unnamed “Communist personnel in high places” and that there were “large numbers of State Department employees” whose loyalty was in question. The McCarthy era thus began three years before the young Senator Joseph McCarthy made his famous speech warning the Ohio County Women’s Republican Club in Wheeling, West Virginia announcing that there were 205 known communists working for the State Department.

Later in 1947, HUAC—whose origins went back to the 1930s, when it failed to identify domestic threats to Americans from fascism or the Ku Klux Klan—held nine days of hearings on the dangers of communism in the Hollywood
movie business. Of the 43 actors, directors, screenwriters, and others who were put on the list of tentative witnesses, 10 ultimately refused to answer some of the committee’s questions. Leading figures in the Motion Picture Association met shortly thereafter in a famous New York City hotel and issued the “Waldorf Statement,” vowing not to employ any of the “Hollywood Ten.” Although no evidence was produced that any of the 10 had ever violated American law (other than refusing to testify to Congress) or that any was a spy, the era of blacklisting started. Ultimately more than 250 people would be placed on the Hollywood blacklist before it began to be challenged.

It was in April 1947 that the term “Cold War” was first employed by financier Bernard Baruch. “Cold War” became engraved in the American lexicon later in 1947 when it was promoted by possibly the most influential foreign policy journalist in the postwar period, Walter Lippmann. In July, Congress adopted the National Security Act of 1947, which remains the statutory backbone of U.S. government’s military and intelligence services. The 1947 Act created the Department of Defense (placing the preexisting military services under the secretary of defense and creating a new Department of the Air Force), the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Council, the National Reconnaissance Office, and the National Security Agency. Historian Daniel Yergin wrote 30 years after the events of the late 1940s words that continue to ring true 30 years later: “The nation was to be permanently prepared. America’s interests and responsibilities were unrestricted and global. National security became a guiding rule, a Commanding Idea.” While American enemies would change, the “Commanding Idea” would not.

The year 1947 might well be seen not only as a turning point in American foreign policy, but also as a turning point where the Cold War helped shape a new consensus in a domestic ideology that involved governmental speech about religion, the perception of the military in American life, and “capitalism” (or “free enterprise”) as being moral virtues. Although there were important events that presaged this transformation prior to 1947, and although there was some resistance to it afterwards, a marked change in prevailing attitudes can be seen beginning in that year. While continuing to employ some older themes involving the religious founding of their country and its providential mission (see chapter 3 below), Americans, for the first time in their history, began to develop a new consensus about their values that would be defined largely in reaction to a foreign ideology. Heretofore, the American consensus ideology had been shaped principally by appealing to the venerable themes of “liberty” and “freedom.”

The pace of world developments and American responses to them continued to accelerate. In mid-1948, the Soviet Union began a blockade of Berlin, prompting President Truman to launch the Berlin Air Lift to supply the necessities of life to the inhabitants of that landlocked city. Whittaker Chambers, an editor of Time magazine, testified before theHUAC that Alger Hiss, scion of an aristocratic American family and an influential force in American foreign policy, was (at least formerly) a communist. When some of the allegations of Chambers
could not be proved, J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, leaked information to a first-term Congressman and a member of the HUAC, Richard M. Nixon, which supported the Chambers allegations. The information fed to Nixon proved helpful in catapulting the 35-year-old into the Senate in 1948 and then into the vice presidency barely four years later. In 1948, in addition to continuing its investigations of Hollywood, the HUAC launched new investigations into black leaders and atomic scientists.

The year 1949 witnessed mounting signs of danger. The Chinese communists, under Mao Zedong, seized control of the mainland and forced Chiang Kai-shek to escape to Taiwan, which he promptly declared to be Nationalist China. This led to fierce internal fighting within the United States, with the “China Lobby” denouncing those within the U.S. government who were responsible for “losing China.” On September 23, Truman announced to the American people that the Soviet Union had detonated an atomic bomb and that the country that constituted the greatest threat to U.S. security was now a member of the nuclear club. Many Americans immediately and correctly suspected that the Soviet Union attained at least some of its nuclear capabilities as a result of espionage rather than from its own original scientific and engineering accomplishments.

In 1949, at the same time that Truman warned the nation about the frightening future with a nuclear-armed Soviet Union, a 31-year-old preacher named Billy Graham was giving nightly sermons in Los Angeles warning that the United States was under the threat of the imminent judgment of God. With Truman’s announcement about the Soviet danger, “Graham seized upon this stunning revelation and hammered it home throughout the campaign.” The revivalist’s message caught the attention of the powerful newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, who famously told his editors to “puff Graham.” Overnight, the young preacher became a hot ticket in the shadows of Hollywood Hills, and he became a celebrity almost overnight. Graham’s Los Angeles sermons about the dangers of a nuclear-armed communist foe helped catapult him to instant stardom. Within a few weeks he was the subject of national media coverage. It was not only Hearst who found the message congenial. Henry Luce, the other Cold War media mogul, similarly took a fancy to Graham’s anticommunist Christian capitalism and gave the 31-year-old preacher wide coverage. Time magazine, in November 1949, alternated between bemused cynicism and bubbling enthusiasm in describing Graham’s ongoing Los Angeles crusade as being held in “a big circus tent (‘the largest revival in history’) [where] Graham seemed to be wielding the revival sickle as no one since Billy Sunday had wielded it.” He was “drawing bigger crowds every night.” Within months he had become sufficiently famous that he was invited to offer a prayer in Congress and to have a private audience with President Truman. Soon Graham was named by the Gallup Organization as one of the 10 men in the world who were most admired by other Americans—a ranking that he ultimately received over 50 times, more than any other person in Gallup’s history.
While Billy Graham’s career was beginning to take off, the first six months of the year 1950 did not augur well for the United States as a whole. In January, Mao Zedong recognized Ho Chi Minh as the leader of Vietnam, and the United States thereupon opted to begin supporting militarily and financially the French colonial government in that country. That same month Alger Hiss was convicted of perjury, though never for espionage or any other crime, and was sentenced to 44 months in prison.18 Also in January, President Truman announced that the United States had launched a program to create an even more powerful nuclear weapon, the hydrogen bomb. To buttress American feelings, Truman told one audience—in language that encapsulated the themes of competition, victory, freedom, and God—that “we are on the right track, and we will win—because I think God is with us in that enterprise.”19 By February, the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship was signed, and Klaus Fuchs was arrested in London for having given the Soviet Union the design for the atomic bomb that was dropped over Nagasaki. February also was the month that Senator Joseph McCarthy gave his Wheeling, West Virginia speech. The Senate’s Tydings Committee immediately investigated McCarthy’s allegations but found that they were without merit.20 Later in 1950, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were arrested for espionage for having passed nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union while in their mid-twenties. They were tried and convicted in 1951 and electrocuted in 1953 while still in their early thirties.

If the first six months of 1950 already were filled with ominous events, “the six months between June and December 1950 rank among the most important of the Cold War era.”21 On June 25, 1950, the heavily armed North Korean army crossed the 38th parallel and invaded the more populous but militarily weaker south. The advancing troops seized the southern country’s capital, Seoul, and pushed the remnants of its tattered army towards the sea. On the same day as the invasion, the Truman administration obtained a unanimous Security Council Resolution 82 that condemned the invasion. (The Soviet Union was at that time boycotting the United Nations.) Two days later, the United Nations approved military aid in favor of South Korea. The United States, which had largely demobilized following World War II, nevertheless had military occupation forces and equipment in Japan under the authority of Douglas MacArthur. Truman immediately ordered MacArthur to take responsibility for “United Nations” forces on the Korean peninsula. Although Americans overwhelmingly supported Truman’s response, the president was sharply rebuked by Republicans in Congress for not having obtained congressional approval as well as for failures in his administration’s handling of foreign policy prior to the invasion. Not only had his administration “lost” China, it was responsible for the alleged blunder on the Korean peninsula. On August 13, 1950, while American troops were in harm’s way in a shooting war, the Republican members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee issued a statement condemning the handling of the war by the commander-in-chief. In September 1950, Senator William Ezra Jenner of Indiana accused General George Marshall and Secretary of State Dean
Acheson of being traitors. Those who first promulgated and implemented the 1947 Loyalty Review Program, Marshall and Acheson, were now themselves accused by a sitting U.S. senator of the ugly crime of treason. The revolution had begun to devour its own children. Although 50 years later these men, along with President Truman, would be praised across the political spectrum for having stood firm and having helped create a consensus foreign policy, in the ideological hothouse of the early 1950s many denounced them as traitors.

Midway through 1950, President Truman had requested a military budget of $13.5 billion. In November, he revised his request with nearly a four-fold total increase to $50 billion. The United States would never be the same.

The three components of the American National Religion—governmental theism, military supremacy, and capitalism as freedom—first described in Chapter 1, emerged following Truman’s speech and gradually became part of an American consensus that has remained the dominant ideological matrix ever since. Each of the three components will be described in turn in Chapters 3 through 5. Of course it must be recognized that there is nothing entirely new under the sun. The ideological themes that developed following 1947 had some roots extending deep into the American soil of the seventeenth century. The following chapter will examine some of the enduring American themes that underlie the more recent emergence of an American National Religion.
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Enduring American Themes

We Are a Peaceful People...

The tallest building on the Washington, D.C. skyline is not the White House, the Capitol building, or the Washington Monument, but the Washington National Cathedral of the Episcopal Church. Built in the English Gothic style, the cathedral has a semi-official status with the U.S. government, having been constructed under a charter granted by Congress in 1893. It is now described as the “National House of Prayer for All People.” Within its walls, solemn national ceremonies take place, from those of thanksgiving (such as celebrating the release of the hostages from Iran in 1983) to those of mourning (such as the funerals and memorial services for Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Reagan, and Ford).

In 2001, Washington National Cathedral was the obvious site to hold the national commemorative service following the September 11 assaults on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Three days after the attacks, American political and religious leaders gathered in the cathedral to pray, sing hymns, and assure the world of America’s resolve in the face of evil. In his televised address from the pulpit of the cathedral, President George W. Bush declared that “This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger.” President Bush’s image of Americans as a peace-loving people who would arise in righteous anger following unprovoked attacks had been offered two days earlier in an article by nationally syndicated columnist George Will. On September 12, Will wrote that “Americans are slow to anger but mighty when angry, and their proper anger now should be alloyed with pride. They are targets because of their virtues—principally democracy, and loyalty to those nations which, like Israel, are embattled salients of our virtues in a still-dangerous world.” In the eyes of President George Bush and columnist George Will, this patient and long-suffering America was attacked not in response to an imagined heavy-handed use of
economic, military, and political power in the world, but because it is so virtu-
ous. America was not attacked because it is perceived as having allied itself with 
corrupt and repressive regimes, but because it is known to be a stalwart defender 
of freedom.

This image of a peaceful and long-suffering America resonates with the senti-
ments of many, and probably most, U.S. citizens. Speaking at a political fund-
raising luncheon a few months later, President Bush, who had been educated at 
Andover, Yale, and Harvard, used somewhat more colloquial language to 
advance the same theme to a more partisan audience. The terrorists, he declared, 
“understand now that this nation is slow to anger, but when angered we will 
chase ’em down and we’ll bring ’em to justice.” A few months later the 
president analogized the United States to a good-natured cowboy:

Texas is a place where people believe in great adventures, boundless optimism, and 
always a bright future. And Texas is the land of the cowboy—an all-American 
fo\[...

When this polite, patient, quiet, and unpretentious, yet steely-tough American 
cowboy is wrongfully provoked by the forces of evil, he straps on his 
six-shooter and deploys measured but deadly force to restore justice and tranqul-
ity to the world. As soon as the enemy is defeated, this American hero, like his 
prototype General George Washington, quietly puts away the weapons of war 
and returns to his peaceful pursuits. An enduring American hero is the man 
who is conscientious and hardworking in his day job but who is ready, at the 
sight of injustice, to spring into action and unleash deadly force to demolish evil. 
Once the world has been set aright, he calmly returns to his prior life without 
seking credit or praise. This American hero has been a recurring figure in popu-
lar culture since at least the beginning of the twentieth century. In novels he 
appears as Owen Wister’s Virginian and as Tom Clancy’s Jack Ryan. In film, 
Gary Cooper played the role to perfection, whether in The Virginian, High Noon, 
or Sergeant York. In the comic strips, the “mild-mannered reporter” in his day 
job is really a “cape crusader” and a “man of steel.”

This idealized self-image of the United States—being slow to anger yet 
mighty when wrongly provoked—allows Americans to perceive in their country, 
without any apparent irony or embarrassment, the dual virtues of being disci-
plined by a peaceful inner strength while simultaneously being prepared to crush 
evildoers at a moment’s notice. This dual characteristic was evoked once again 
on the day that the United States unleashed its aerial bombardment of Afghan-
pistan in 2001, less than one month after the attacks of September 11. Announcing 
the beginning of that war, President Bush assured the world that “We’re a peace-
ful nation.” Speaking less solemnly, only a few months later, a White House 
transcript of the president quotes him as saying more colloquially: “We are slow
to anger but, when angered, watch out. (Applause.)” In March of 2003, when announcing the massive “shock and awe” bombardment of Baghdad that had been designed to terrify Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi army, President Bush assured the world that “We are a peaceful people.”

Earlier American presidents also have assured the world that the United States has only peaceful intentions and that its weapons of war are produced solely for the defensive purpose of maintaining the peace. Overseeing the keel-laying of the world’s first nuclear-powered submarine, the U.S.S. Nautilus, President Truman declared that “we are a peaceful people, not a warlike people. We want peace and we work hard for peace. This is a great day for us, a day to celebrate—not because we are starting a new ship for war, but because we are making a great advance in the use of atomic energy for peace.” On October 22, 1962, in announcing the United States’ naval blockade of Cuba, President Kennedy assured the Soviets that “we are a peaceful people who desire to live in peace with all other peoples.” President Ronald Reagan invoked the “slow to anger” message upon launching American military actions abroad. In his promise to rid the world of terrorists, made 20 years before President Bush’s similar assurances, Reagan explained that:

We Americans are slow to anger. We always seek peaceful avenues before resorting to the use of force—and we did. We tried quiet diplomacy, public condemnation, economic sanctions, and demonstrations of military force. None succeeded. Despite our repeated warnings, Qadhafi continued his reckless policy of intimidation, his relentless pursuit of terror. He counted on America to be passive. He counted wrong. I warned that there should be no place on Earth where terrorists can rest and train and practice their deadly skills. I meant it. I said that we would act with others, if possible, and alone if necessary to ensure that terrorists have no sanctuary anywhere.

In announcing that the United States would be sending military aid to support the government of President Jose Napoleon Duarte of El Salvador (later disclosed as being a CIA agent), President Reagan stated, “We are both a nation of peace and a people of justice. By our very nature, we are slow to anger and magnanimous in helping those in less fortunate circumstances. No nation on Earth has been more generous to others in need, but we also have our limits—and our limits have been reached.”

Supplementing the image of a peaceful and long-suffering America that nevertheless stands ready to engage in retribution when justice demands it, Democratic Senator Robert Byrd added “rationality” to the mix. “Fortunately, the United States has a tradition in foreign policy of being slow to anger. We have nurtured a reputation of being rational and deliberate.” Former Attorney General John Ashcroft seized upon the same theme. Unlike terrorists, who believe Americans to be “feckless,” Ashcroft assured his listeners that Americans are “slow to anger, but determined when provoked.” In 2006, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace, speaking in the magazine
Soldier of Fortune, concurred: “Americans are slow to anger, desirous of living peacefully, but also have a point that if you cross it, they raise up a strength that our enemies will never understand.” In its first major report on the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the U.S. Army analysis began not with an assessment of the war but with a description of the character of the American people:

Slow to anger, Americans traditionally spend most of their time pursuing personal goals, each with his or her own version of the American dream. But for many, the events of 11 September quickly burned into their consciousness, changing their lives in ways that only slowly began to register. As the nation mourned, it did so with the realization that sadness would give way to anger, and anger to justice.

From where did this image of being “slow to anger yet ready to unleash fury in the name of justice” originate? The book of Nahum in the Bible contains one possible answer.

The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath his way and in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. (Nahum 1:3, emphasis added)

In this passage containing the words of the biblical prophet Nahum, the one who is slow to anger, but who responds with righteous force when wrongly provoked, is not the United States or the American people—but God. Psalm 103 invokes similar language—also to describe God:

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. (Psalm 103:8–9)

The Bible sometimes uses the term “slow to anger” to praise righteous people. When the Bible praises human beings for being slow to anger, it is in the context of their not seeking retribution against their enemies. “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (Proverbs 16:32). This passage of Proverbs suggests that it is much better for a person to remain slow to anger than it is to be a mighty warrior who defeats evildoers and wins battles. The Apostle Paul, like the author of the proverb, argues that human beings should not seek revenge, or punish enemies, or insist on bringing evildoers to justice.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:19–21, emphasis added)

For Paul, “vengeance” belongs to God and not to any human being or to any nation-state. In James, being “slow to anger” is a virtue and becoming wrathful is unrighteous. “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (James 1:19–20, emphasis added). Proverbs criticizes the “wrathful
man” who “stirreth up strife” but praises “he that is slow to anger” because he “appeaseth strife” (Proverbs 15:18). The New Testament instructs human beings to be kind to their enemies: “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). It does not recommend that human beings fill themselves with righteous anger and then destroy their enemies.

In American political rhetoric, which repeatedly evokes biblical language in support of military action, the United States and the American people are substituted in the role that the Bible assigns to God alone.

* * * *

Placing the United States in the position that the scriptures give to God is not a recent innovation in American political rhetoric. During the presidency of George Washington, a graduate of Yale College named David Austin explained contemporary political events in America through the lens of the Bible’s book of Revelation. Like Austin, many American writers since the seventeenth century have declared that the images appearing in Revelation are not simply metaphorical references to events in the first century of the common era (as most scholars believe) but contain prophecies describing the United States.

Austin argued in 1796 that the “Manchild” identified in chapter 12 of Revelation was not Jesus Christ, as had long been assumed, but was actually the United States of America. According to Austin’s patriotic interpretation of Revelation, the event of world significance referenced in the scripture was not the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, but “the Fourth of July, 1776, when the birth of the MANCHILD—the hero of civil and religious liberty—took place in these United States.” The United States not only replaced Jesus Christ in Austin’s interpretation, but the country also was granted the role of becoming the world’s guardian of civil and religious liberties.

Behold, then, this hero of America, wielding the standard of civil and religious liberty over these United States!—Follow him, in his strides, across the Atlantic!—See him, with his spear already in the heart of the beast! See tyranny, civil and ecclesiastical, bleeding at every pore! See the votaries of the tyrants; of the beasts; of the false prophets, and serpents of the earth, ranged in battle array, to withstand the progress and dominion of him, who hath commission to break down the usurpations of tyranny—to let the prisoner out of the prison-house; and to set the vassal in bondage free from his chains—to level the mountains—to raise the valleys, and to prepare an highway for the Lord.

When Austin published these bellicose words in 1796, the United States of America was a mere seven-year-old stripling with a population of a scant five million people, the vast majority of whom lived within a few miles of the Atlantic Ocean. The ragtag American revolutionary army and navy that had revolted against English rule had long since been demobilized. In the eighteenth century,
most Americans believed that standing armies were repugnant to liberty. The United States was so weak militarily that American merchant vessels remained subject to the whims not only of the dominant European military powers but even to the pirates of the Barbary Coast. Within one year of Austin’s truculent boast about the invincible United States, the French navy seized more than 300 American merchant vessels. Although the American people were indeed a very real threat to their slaves and the indigenous Native American population, they certainly did not intimidate Europeans or the pope.

Austin’s super-strength American action hero, who bestrode oceans and sent fear into the hearts of evildoers, was nothing more than a literary fiction. But the rhetorical devices that Austin deployed, including using scriptural language substituting the United States for God, continue to resonate to this day. On the first anniversary of the attacks of September 11, for example, President Bush explained in words that echo the same religious-liberty themes as those in Austin’s idle boast of 1796:

> Our country is strong. And our cause is even larger than our country. Ours is the cause of human dignity; freedom guided by conscience and guarded by peace. This ideal of America is the hope of all mankind. That hope drew millions to this harbor. That hope still lights our way. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness will not overcome it.

These metaphors for America—“the hope of all mankind” and “a light shining in the darkness that cannot be overcome”—are borrowed from the gospel of John. In John, however, the light refers not to a country or to any political entity, but to the Lord Jesus Christ: “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5). For John, it is Christ who is the hope of all mankind. Similarly, in President Bush’s January 2003 State of the Union address, delivered while the U.S. military was preparing for its massive invasion of Iraq, the president declared, “Yet there’s power, wonder-working power, in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people.” While this reference may have been lost on some of his listeners, the allusion was to the refrain in the nineteenth-century Evangelical hymn “There is Power in the Blood.”

> There is power, power, wonder-working power
> In the blood of the Lamb;
> There is power, power, wonder-working power
> In the precious blood of the Lamb.

The presidential rhetoric placed the American people in the same position that the hymn accorded to Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the most striking example of American willingness to substitute its military interests for God’s will occurred in the midst of the Spanish-American War of 1898. On July 6, 1898, President McKinley seized on the long-lapsed tradition and issued a presidential proclamation just before midnight. In the 12 preceding weeks the United States had declared war on Spain, defeated its
navy in Manila Bay, invaded Cuba (where it had beaten the Spanish army in several battles), invaded the Philippines, and seized Guam. After boasting of these stunning American military victories, McKinley’s July 6 “Day of Thanksgiving” proclamation declared, in explicitly religious terms:

It is fitting that we should pause, and, staying the feeling of exultation that too naturally attends great deeds wrought by our countrymen in our country’s cause, should reverently bow before the throne of Divine Grace and give devout praise to God, who holdeth the nations in the hollow of His hands and worketh upon them the marvels of His high will, and who has thus far vouchsafed to us the light of His face and led our brave soldiers and seamen to victory.25

In his uncontained glee, President McKinley saw American military action (which had been urged upon him for months by William Randolph Hearst and others) as having accomplished the divine will of God. The president was speaking not simply as a political figure arguing for the national security interests of the United States but as if he were a prophet speaking in pseudo-biblical language to announce that God’s will had been accomplished by American military power. For the successes already achieved, the president asked Americans “to offer thanksgiving to Almighty God, who, in His inscrutable ways...has watched over our cause and brought nearer the success of the right and the attainment of just and honorable peace.”26 McKinley underscored that Americans really are a peaceful people who detest war.

And, above all, let us pray with earnest fervor that He, the Dispenser of all good, may speedily remove from us the untold affiliations of war and bring to our dear land the blessings of restored peace and to all the domain now ravaged by the cruel strife the priceless boon of security and tranquility.27

The day after issuing this Thanksgiving proclamation praising God, President McKinley signed papers unilaterally annexing the Hawaiian Islands to the United States without any consultation with the people of those islands.

The McKinley Thanksgiving proclamation also urged Americans to go to church on the following Sunday. The president recommended that they gather at their respective places of worship to give thanks to God for the many successes that He had granted. Following his own recommendation, McKinley attended Sunday services at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington to hear the sermon of the Reverend Dr. Frank Bristol and listen to the singing of “patriotic hymns.”28 The news media eagerly accompanied the president to church and reported that the Reverend Bristol also made it clear that the American people truly are God’s chosen people.

If God ever had a peculiar people He has them now. They are the product of all the struggles and aspirations of the past. The men who stand before Santiago [Cuba] are not the product of a day or a century. They are the rich, consummate flower of the ages, the highest evolution of history. They represent a manhood that has climbed century by century up the [steps] of light and liberty, and now stands in
sight of the glorified summits of the universal freedom and the universal brotherhood of man.

If this at first sounds more Darwinian than Christian, the Reverend Bristol makes it clear that it is God who has overseen the rise of Americans to the pinnacle of human evolution.

Do you look toward [the successful fighting in] Manila and Santiago and say superior guns did the business? I say superior men stood behind the guns, superior schools stood behind the men, the superior religion stood behind the schools, and God, the Supreme, stood behind the religion.

Inasmuch as the Spanish opponents of the American warriors also were Christians, albeit Roman Catholics, the Reverend Bristol appears to be suggesting that the “superior religion” is American Protestantism and the inferior religion is Catholicism. The American soldiers and the government officials who stood behind them were not fighting on behalf of a political power, let alone a political power with imperial ambitions.

Thanks to all those sons of God who in offices of State and on fields of battle have caught the spirit of the heroic Christ and have pledged their fortunes, their sacred honor, and their lives to realize the kingdom of righteousness and peace among men.

While the Methodist congregation listening to this sermon and the president of the United States might have been shocked to hear the blaspemous utterances that equated American military victories with the spirit of Jesus Christ, they seem not to have noticed. Rather, “at times Dr. Bristol’s hearers were so thoroughly aroused by his patriotic utterances that ripples of spontaneous applause swept over the congregation.”

One might have imagined that a country that is deeply religious and that takes its Bible seriously would be chagrined by the rhetoric of American politicians who substitute human beings and a nation-state in the role that the scriptures reserve for God. But this political rhetoric, which is frequently deployed in support of U.S. military action, is largely not challenged for being heretical but is found to be comforting and reassuring. Presidents McKinley and Bush were not accused of blasphemy by their religious supporters; they were applauded instead.

...A Religious People...

Americans often describe themselves as being a religious people. The most left-leaning Supreme Court justice in American history, William O. Douglas, famously wrote in a 1952 Supreme Court decision: “We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.” Justice Douglas’s sentence is frequently quoted as if it were a “proof-text” that the United States is a religious country and that its institutions do presuppose the existence and support of God. Americans’ perceived religiosity has indeed long been observed by
foreign and domestic commentators alike, as Alexis de Tocqueville and others had already noted in the early nineteenth century. Americans pride themselves on their religiosity and are quick to point to their long heritage of openness to religion and religious freedom. For Americans, declaring their belief in God is a sign of good sense and a respect for moral values; it is not a sign of eccentricity, daring, ignorance, or fanaticism.

Nearly half of Americans believe that the United States benefits from God’s “special protection.” Almost 60 percent of Americans believe that the strength of the United States comes from its religious faith. In one survey, 65 percent of Americans described their country as a “Christian nation,” the term that Justice Brewer famously used in a nineteenth-century Supreme Court opinion and that is frequently quoted by those who argue that the United States was founded on Christian values.

By several measures of religiosity, the United States is the most religious country in the industrialized world. The measures include public opinion surveys, attendance at religious services, membership in religious organizations, and voluntary financial contributions to religious organizations. In a 44-country survey of attitudes about religion, a higher percentage of Americans than citizens of any other industrialized country—59 percent—reported that religion was “very important” in their lives. In other industrialized countries the rate was typically half that of the United States: Britain (33 percent), Canada (30 percent), Korea (25 percent), France (11 percent), and Japan (12 percent). In another study, approximately 82 percent of Americans reported that religion is “very important” or “fairly important” in their lives. Seventy-seven percent believe that the Bible is either the “actual” or “inspired” word of God. In another poll that compared the United States, Canada, South Korea, Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom, Americans offered the highest percentage of favorable responses to the questions about the “importance of religion in your life” and belief in God. Between 85 percent and 90 percent of Americans report that they believe in God, higher than any other industrialized country. The first President Bush, speaking to the National Religious Broadcasters, said:

Let me begin with some good news for modern man. According to Gallup, the Gallup surveys, no society is more religious than the United States of America. Seven in ten Americans believe in life after death; 8 in 10, that God works miracles. Nine in ten Americans pray. And more than 90 percent believe in God, to which I say, thank God. I wish it were 100 percent.

President Bush’s expression “good news for modern man” is, of course, the name that the American Bible Society gave to its 1966 translation of the New Testament. For the president, who was at that point campaigning for reelection, the percentage of people who believe in God was not only inspirational, but aspirational as well. While there are other countries that exceed the United States on measures of religiosity, they typically are found in the Islamic world, South America, and Africa.
A Chosen People with a Divine Mission...

The Hebrew Bible identifies God’s “chosen people” as the Jews (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; Isaiah 43:20). The Christian New Testament alternatively suggests that God’s “chosen generation...holy nation...peculiar people” are those who voluntarily choose accept the teachings of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9). But from the time that colonists from England began settling the eastern coast of North America in the seventeenth century, public rhetoric began to identify Americans as God’s chosen people and after the eighteenth century the United States as having been given a special mission from God. A leading scholar of this subject, Ernest Lee Tuveson, identified a “millennialist” worldview—a “belief that history, under divine guidance, will bring about the triumph of Christian principles and that a holy utopia will come into being”—as originating in the seventeenth century.38 Although its American roots go back at least as far as Increase Mather’s reference to his forefathers’ “pious Errand into this Wilderness,” full-bodied American millennialism arrived in 1771 in the writings of Timothy Dwight.39

Arguably the greatest American novelist of the nineteenth century, Herman Melville applied the term “chosen people” to his fellow countrymen. In words that echo those of David Austin in 1796, Melville declared in one of his earliest writings that

Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. Seventy years ago we escaped from thrall; and, besides our first birthright—embracing one continent of earth—God has given to us, for a future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans, that shall yet come and lie down under the shade of our ark, without bloody hands being lifted. God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours.40

Having blessed his chosen people with an abundant land and with prosperous commerce, God now expects that Americans will do his work throughout the entire world. In the following decade, the most famous essayist of the nineteenth century, Ralph Waldo Emerson, matched the words of the most famous novelist of the era: “Our whole history appears like a last effort of the Divine providence in behalf of the human race.”41

One of the best known and most widely read religious writers in nineteenth-century America, Horace Bushnell, delivered his famous Phi Beta Kappa oration about the United States in 1837. He located the true strength of America in its people. But for him it was not the land or the opportunities of America that gave rise to a great people; rather, it was the hand of God that directed one particular race—the Anglo-Saxons, the “noblest” of them all—to its shores.
There are too many prophetic signs admonishing us that Almighty Providence is pre-engaged to make this a truly great nation, not to be cheered by them, and set ourselves to a search after the true principles of national welfare, with a confidence that here, at last, they are to find their opportunity. This western world had not been preserved unknown through so many ages, for any purpose less sublime, than to be opened, at a certain stage of history, and become the theater wherein better principles might have room and free development. Out of all the inhabitants of the world, too, a select stock, the Saxon, and out of this the British family, the noblest of the stock, was chosen to people our country.42

The prominent Protestant clergyman Josiah Strong, a founder of the Social Gospel Movement, similarly preached that Americans were particularly privileged by God. “Surely, to be a Christian and an Anglo-Saxon, and an American in this generation is to stand on the very mountain-top of privilege.”43

The same millennial themes evoked by Austin, Dwight, Melville, Emerson, Strong, and Bushnell, each of whom identified the divinely chosen American people (particularly the “Anglo-Saxons”) as God’s special agents, was epitomized in one of the most famous American speeches of the late nineteenth century, Albert J. Beveridge’s “The March of the Flag.” Beveridge declared that “It is a glorious history our God has bestowed upon His chosen people; a history heroic with faith in our mission and our future.” This September 1898 speech, celebrating the victories of the Spanish-American War, catapulted Beveridge from his career as a lawyer into that of an influential member of the U.S. Senate and a figure of national prominence.

It is a noble land that God has given us; a land that can feed and clothe the world; a land whose coastlines would enclose half the countries of Europe; a land set like a sentinel between the two imperial oceans of the globe, a greater England with a nobler destiny.

It is a mighty people that He has planted on this soil; a people sprung from the most masterful blood of history; a people perpetually revitalized by the virile, man-producing working-folk of all the earth; a people imperial by virtue of their power, by right of their institutions, by authority of their Heaven-directed purposes—the propagandists and not the misers of liberty. . . .

The commercial supremacy of the Republic means that this Nation is to be the sovereign factor in the peace of the world. For the conflicts of the future are to be conflicts of trade—struggles for markets—commercial wars for existence. And the golden rule of peace is impregnability of position and invincibility of preparedness. . . .

Wonderfully has God guided us. Yonder at Bunker Hill and Yorktown His providence was above us. At New Orleans and on ensanguined seas His hand sustained us. Abraham Lincoln was His minister and His was the altar of freedom the Nation’s soldiers set up on a hundred battle-fields. His power directed Dewey in the East and delivered the Spanish fleet into our hands, as He delivered the elder Armada into the hands of our English sires two centuries ago.44

The “March of the Flag” speech was declaimed, printed, repeated, distributed, and even endorsed by Republicans in several states as their principal campaign
document in the heady election year of 1898. Beveridge deployed the same aggressive and boisterous themes that David Austin had unleashed almost exactly 100 years earlier, but this time the words were delivered with the force of real armaments rather than Austin’s imaginary “omnipotent arms.”

While 1898 may have seen the apogee of American military boastfulness, the Austin-Beveridge themes did not go quietly into the night. President Woodrow Wilson, whether advocating the use of the American military “to make the world safe for democracy” or promoting the League of Nations to bring an end to all future wars, declared that it was the providential mission of the United States to use its power to save the world. More recently, in language blending religion and the American character, President Ronald Reagan boasted that his fellow countrymen both embodied and promoted God’s message of hope and freedom for the entire world. Americans, Reagan insisted, are hopeful, big-hearted, idealistic, daring, decent, and fair. That’s our heritage; that is our song. We sing it still. For all our problems, our differences, we are together as of old, as we raise our voices to the God who is the Author of this most tender music. And may He continue to hold us close as we fill the world with our sound—sound in unity, affection, and love—one people under God, dedicated to the dream of freedom that He has placed in the human heart, called upon now to pass that dream on to a waiting and hopeful world.45

In August 1990, the month that U.S. troops were first sent to Saudi Arabia as a part of Operation Desert Storm leading to the invasion of Iraq, the first President Bush flattered himself and his audience by suggesting, immodestly, that the U.S. government under his leadership should become the moral compass for the entire world. “We’re here today to say a prayer for the United States and all the people around the world that are supporting us in our bid to provide a moral compass for the rest of the world.”46 Bush the son similarly universalized the American view of the world one decade later: “The American creed remains powerful today because it represents the universal hope of all mankind.”47 According to both Presidents Bush, the United States should not be seen as a country pursuing its national interests in a complex world; rather, all people of the world should look to the United States for moral and spiritual leadership.

Is the United States a “Redeemer Nation” or a “City on a Hill”?

American rhetoric about its foreign policies is often couched in moralistic terms. Within this moralism, many observers have identified two competing strands. The first emphasizes the importance of American power (military and economic) as a force to bring positive change—particularly freedom—to the world. The second strand emphasizes the importance of American moral authority, and it argues that the United States serves the world best when it acts as a positive example and inspiration when it shares its example and wealth with others.
Three important books published during the 1960s independently identified different versions of these two strands within the larger moralism. Senator J.W. Fulbright, the politically prominent and influential chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the 1960s and an early opponent of the war in Vietnam, argued in *The Arrogance of Power* that the inconstancy of American foreign policy is not an accident but an expression of two distinct sides of the American character. Both are characterized by a kind of moralism, but one is the morality of decent instincts tempered by the knowledge of human imperfection and the other is the morality of absolute self-assurance fired by the crusading spirit.\(^{48}\)

The second book, *Redeemer Nation*, written by Ernest Lee Tuveson, a reclusive literary historian, investigated the religious and ideological themes in American history that had long been lumped together under the generic name of “manifest destiny.” He argued that the larger “manifest destiny” theme could better be seen as two competing elements:

“Manifest Destiny” may, then refer to either of two kinds of expectations for the settlements in North America: that they may become a New Rome, or that they may be the new Promised Land of a chosen people. The ultimate effects of these ideas are widely divergent.\(^{49}\)

The first of these—the New Rome—of course is that of an American imperium with ambitions to expand its size and influence through the use of force and was exemplified by America’s nineteenth-century wars with Mexico and Spain. The second of these is a promised land evoking agrarian images of milk and honey.

A third book, by Harvard history professor Frederick Merk, similarly analyzed the political conflicts of the mid-nineteenth century surrounding the expansionist efforts to push the frontiers of the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans, but it focused on political and historical records rather than literary evidence. Yet Merk, like Fulbright and Tuveson, similarly identified two competing tendencies within the larger common purpose of expanding the frontiers of the United States. One he called “mission” and the other “manifest destiny.” Both concepts, he argued, were already 200 years old in America by the time that the term “manifest destiny” was finally and belatedly coined in 1845 (by the journalist John L. O’Sullivan). “Manifest Destiny and imperialism were traps into which the nation was led in 1846 and in 1899, and from which it extricated itself as well as it could afterward.”\(^{50}\) Merk himself did not believe that “manifest destiny” was the more enduring American guiding theme. “A truer expression of the national spirit was *Mission*. This was present from the beginning of American history, and is present, clearly, today. It was idealistic, self-denying, hopeful of divine favor for national aspirations, though not sure of it.”\(^{51}\)

None of these men was either the first or the last to identify such contrasting views of the American character. Two of the many terms that are used to describe (or contrast) the competing American tendencies are “redeemer nation”
and “city on a hill.” Both terms can be traced back to themes emerging as early as the seventeenth century in America, although they push in somewhat different directions. The “redeemer nation” theme sees the United States as first drawing upon its moral authority and then using its power, including economic and military force, to push for changes in the world, whereas the “city on a hill” suggests leadership by inspirational example.

The most famous spokesman of the redeemer nation worldview was President Woodrow Wilson, both in his military efforts to make the world safe for democracy and his postwar efforts to establish a League of Nations for the purpose of ending all wars. It is this “redeemer” tendency, seeing the United States as a divine or moral instrument to change the world through the use of power, that we saw most clearly at the beginning of this chapter. It is the rhetoric of “redeemer nation” that has repeatedly and effectively been used to galvanize popular support but that carries with it the risk of placing the United States or the “American people” in the role that scripture assigns to God. The popular song that perhaps best encapsulates the substitution of the United States and its people for God is Julia Ward Howe’s much beloved “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” In this song, the Lord is seen not in the heavens above or heard in the words of his prophets. Rather, God is associated with an army: “I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps.” In the “redeemer nation” narrative, we have God and country, zeal, “a terrible swift sword,” self-assurance, manifest destiny, and a military power on the march.

A contrasting metaphor for the United States, which also derives from both biblical language and American religious history, is that of a “city on a hill.” This metaphor, which has become a staple in American political rhetoric, first appears in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus used the image to describe those who accept and follow his teachings.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:14–16)

In this scriptural passage, those who accept and adhere to the teachings of Jesus will be seen as a light unto the entire world in order to give glory to God. The Sermon on the Mount passage says nothing about nation-states, countries, armies, conquests, or political power but suggests how people should live. Several centuries later, the “city on a hill” image was first introduced into the American lexicon by the John Winthrop in his sermon entitled “A Modell of Christian Charity” that was written aboard the ship Arbella in 1630. Preaching to the Puritans who had set sail for the new world, Winthrop declared, without specifically referring to the gospel of Matthew, that we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.
The purpose of Winthrop’s metaphorical city, like that of its first-century prototype, was not to glorify either the city, or the hill, or its inhabitants—but to call upon the people to behave in accordance with God’s laws. The purpose of the “city on a hill” evoked by Jesus and Winthrop would ultimately be turned completely on its head in later American political rhetoric.

The political leader who perhaps used this figure of speech more than any other was Ronald Reagan. In his farewell address to the nation, on January 11, 1989, President Reagan, after crediting Winthrop for the metaphor, commented:

I’ve spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don’t know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace, a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity, and if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That’s how I saw it and see it still.

President Reagan’s city is a bustling, commercially successful metropolis that should be admired for its wealth and success. The city is less a glory to God and more of a proof of God’s particular favor.

Democratic Governor Mario Cuomo, in his keynote address to the Democratic National Convention, criticized one of President Reagan’s earlier evocations of the city on a hill metaphor. “The President is right. In many ways we are a shining city on a hill. But the hard truth is that not everyone is sharing in this city’s splendor and glory.” Governor Cuomo did not question the shining city as an ideal, nor whether it had in part been attained, but chided the president because the glories of the city had yet to be obtained by all Americans. The “hard truth is that not everyone is sharing in this city’s splendor and glory. A shining city is perhaps all the President sees from the portico of the White House and the veranda of his ranch.” Cuomo wanted the shining city to be a place where material and social prosperity would be available for all rather than for the privileged few. He wanted more people to live within its walls. He argued that, with changes in governmental policies, it would indeed be possible to achieve the goal of having “one city, indivisible, shining for all of its people.”

For both politicians, President Reagan and Governor Cuomo, the shining city is “proud” and has “splendor and glory” in its own right. It is not praised for the glory it gives to God, but for its own sake as a noble accomplishment and aspiration. While both politicians credit Winthrop with the pleasing image, they ignored his underlying message. For Winthrop, “it appears plainly that no man is made more honorable than another or more wealthy etc., out of any particular and singular respect to himself, but for the glory of his Creator and the common good of the creature, man.”

While Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount did not link the world of faith to that of politics, Winthrop’s Sermon on the Ship did. Winthrop, who was a political leader and not a clergyman, underscored that he and his fellow voyagers were,
by “mutual consent,” seeking “a place of cohabitation and consortship under a
due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical.” Some modern commenta-
tors have suggested that Winthrop’s “Modell of Christian Charity” should be
seen as a text that supports an underlying religious—and sometimes explicitly
“Christian”—foundation of the American experiment. Unsurprisingly, those
who now cite Winthrop as evidence that America was founded as a Christian
nation typically fail to look at the actual political-ecclesiastical ideals he pro-
moted. The Modell of Christian Charity did not embrace anything approaching
modern-day capitalism (or free-market economics) nor did it foresee anything
resembling a national-security state. Winthrop called upon his fellow passengers
to engage in a radical Christian experiment that emphasized a common concern
for the spiritual and material well-being of everyone and that explicitly
denounced the individual pursuit of wealth, status, and prestige. In his political-
religious sermon-manifesto, Winthrop asserted that

when there is no other means whereby our Christian brother may be relieved in his
distress, we must help him beyond our ability rather than tempt God in putting him
upon help by miraculous or extraordinary means. This duty of mercy is exercised
in the kinds: giving, lending and forgiving (of a debt). [If someone in debt has no
means of repaying his obligations,] thou must lend him, though there be danger of
losing it. (Deut. 15:7–8). If any of thy brethren be poor...thou shalt lend him
sufficient.

John Winthrop’s America certainly did not operate on capitalist or laissez-faire
economic principles, but on a God-infused system where everyone is responsible
for the well-being of the other. Nor did Winthrop’s sermon advocate a security
apparatus to guarantee the safety of the Puritans from attacks by enemies, foreign
or domestic. For him, the future settlers of America should do all that they could
to promote Christian charity while leaving their safety, security, and prosperity in
the hands of God. Winthrop’s American experiment, at least as proposed in his
sermon, resembled the radical, communalistic, peaceable kingdom foreseen by
the early Christian church, not the modern “free enterprise” and “American way
of life” ideology that emerged fully in the second half of the twentieth century.

But putting aside the original meanings of the “city on a hill” implied by Jesus
and Winthrop, there nevertheless remains a striking difference between the
United States seeking to influence the world by virtue of providing an inspiring
example, as would the shining city on a hill, and the United States acting as a
redeemer nation that is committed to using its considerable power and force—
military and economic—to reshape the world to conform to its own inspired
vision. Though the contrasting themes of an exemplary city on a hill and a
world-transforming redeemer nation seeking to rid the world of evil have both
played a part in American public rhetoric, the redeemer nation motif has been
the more potent.

Several American presidents have appealed to the rhetoric of the United States
taking upon itself the role of ridding the world of evil, including most notably
William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush. Other prominent Americans of their time were famous propagandists of such themes, including the clergyman Josiah Strong and Senator Albert J. Beveridge. Beveridge, whose praises of American victories in the Spanish American War were quoted above, was one of the best-known orators of the late nineteenth century. He helped elevate the American flag as a quasi-religious symbol fit for display not only on American warships but in the sanctuaries of her churches. He applauded American military conquests that would bring the “benighted” people of the world under the flag’s protection. David Austin’s calls in 1796 for the use of American power abroad to bring an end to evil resulted only in enhancing the fame of Austin. The comparable calls of Josiah Strong and Albert Beveridge were understood in a deadly serious way, as were the later pronouncements by Woodrow Wilson and George W. Bush when launching military operations.

Many American military endeavors—notably the Spanish American War, the Great War, and the Second Gulf War—were enthusiastically promoted by their advocates as being part of a providential mission whereby the American nation would help bring religious freedom to the world and help rid it of evil. Americans caught up in the enthusiasm of these campaigns believed that the demonstration to the world of American force and willpower would be the catalyst for solving otherwise intractable problems. Typically, presidents and prophets of war neither foresaw nor forewarned their countrymen of the painful realities that would likely follow.

Of course apocalyptic language can be used not only in support of wars, but to promote crusades for peace as well. Arguing in favor of the ratification of the Covenant of the League of Nations, Woodrow Wilson asserted, ultimately unsuccessfully, that “nothing less depends upon this decision [whether to ratify] than the liberation and salvation of the world.” It seems, however, that American politicians have had far more success in rallying the public when God’s name is invoked on behalf of fighting a war rather than engaging in diplomacy. It is easier to imagine the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” being used more effectively in support of invading Iraq than a war to eradicate hunger.
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Part II

An American National Religion
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Governmental Theism: Religion as the “First Line of Defense”

As long as this country trusts in God, it will prevail. To serve as a constant reminder of this truth, it is highly desirable that our currency and coins should bear these inspiring words, “In God We Trust.”

—Representative Charles E. Bennett, 1955
Introducing bill to place “In God We Trust” on paper currency

It is a minor bill. I’d like to get rid of it before we get to the Defense Production Act.
—Senator J.W. Fulbright
Chairman, Senate Banking Committee, 1955
Executive Session hearing on bill placing “In God We Trust” on paper currency

The Traumas of Pearl Harbor and the World Trade Center

The bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center of September 11, 2001, were two of the most traumatic events in modern American history. In both cases, as could be expected, the presidents of the United States spoke immediately and directly to the shocked American public about the unwarranted attacks on their country and encouraged them to undertake the task of defeating the enemy. But Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and George W. Bush spoke two different languages when calling upon the public to prepare for the struggles ahead.

The two speeches, separated by 60 years, were relatively short, each containing fewer than 1,000 words, although the speech of President Bush’s was almost twice as long. President Roosevelt’s address was delivered to a joint session of Congress on December 8, 1941, while President Bush spoke at Washington National Cathedral on September 14, 2001. Both spoke, as would be expected,
of the unprovoked attacks on a peaceful people who now were united in the cause of fighting the enemy and who would not relent until the final victory was achieved. But where President Roosevelt spoke “merely” of the victory of Americans over the Japanese, President Bush, in words echoing President Woodrow Wilson, explained to his listeners that the world was created according to a “moral design” and that it was America’s mission to “rid the world of evil.” Bush concluded his address by imploring that God would always continue to guide the United States while warning enemies that Americans have a “righteous might.” Both speeches mention God and the goodness of the American people (Roosevelt even uses the term “righteousness”). Roosevelt, however, mentioned “God” only once and then as his concluding expression to show the firmness of the resolve (“so help us God”), whereas Bush evoked the divinity 15 times (God, Lord, him, his, he). President Bush also mentioned angels and referred to prayers 12 times (Roosevelt none). Should we imagine that the differing tone of the two speeches and their contrasting references to God and prayer reflected only the personal attitudes of two different men? Or had something happened to the presidency and the American people in the 60 years between 1941 and 2001 that led to the delivery of two different messages following two horrific attacks?

Let Us Pray . . .

Before 1947

During the first fifty years of the United States, a total of three presidents issued a total of six proclamations of thanksgiving and prayer. George Washington issued two during the eight years of his presidency (1789 and 1795) and John Adams two in four years (1798 and 1799). Thomas Jefferson believed that such proclamations were unconstitutional and issued none. James Madison, who also believed they were unconstitutional at the time that he became president and after his presidency was over, nevertheless issued two (1814 and 1815) during his eight years in office. Presidential thanksgiving proclamations thereafter dropped off the national agenda until the Civil War. (President John Tyler issued one proclamation of prayer and fasting on the untimely death of President Harrison in 1841, and President Zachary Taylor issued a proclamation of prayer, fasting, and humiliation in 1849 while cholera was decimating the American population.) President Abraham Lincoln is generally credited with launching the tradition of issuing annual proclamations of thanksgiving and prayer towards the end of his presidency.

The decision to have a single national day of thanksgiving was permanently established only in 1939, when Roosevelt decided to declare the “third Thursday of November” as Thanksgiving Day rather than follow the tradition started by Lincoln, who had selected the “last Thursday in November.” Although in most years there is no difference between the third and last Thursdays of November, once every few years November has more than three Thursdays. Roosevelt abandoned Lincoln’s “last Thursday” in favor of the “third Thursday” because
commercial retailers had complained that when Thanksgiving fell on the fourth Thursday of the month it cut short the Christmas shopping season. Roosevelt sided with the retailers over the traditionalists. (Wags who opposed Roosevelt’s tampering with tradition referred to the third Thursday celebration as “Franksgiving Day.”) Congress intervened in 1941 and declared by law that Thanksgiving would henceforth be on the fourth Thursday of November.

The Tide Turns with Truman

Within the first four months of his presidency, Harry Truman issued three official proclamations declaring days of national prayer: “a day of mourning and prayer” to observe the death of President Roosevelt (April 14, 1945), a “day of prayer” of thanksgiving for victory in Europe and mourning for those who lost their lives (May 13, 1945), and a “day of prayer” in thanksgiving for victory in Japan and for the memory of those who lost their lives (August 19, 1945). The Truman proclamations of 1945 were completely different in tone from the boastful triumphalism of President McKinley, who saw American troops as agents of God’s will, and of President Wilson, who portrayed God as a supporter of his political decisions. Rather, they are more reflective and thankful to God who gave “help” and who “has strengthened us and given us the victory.” The Truman proclamations speak of “joyful thanks” for having been able to help cleanse the world of “the forces of evil.” On Sunday, August 19, the day of prayer for victory in Japan, Truman organized a religious service in the East Room of the White House to which 200 “friends and dignitaries” were invited, including members of the Supreme Court, the cabinet, and military officials. The chief chaplains of the army and navy conducted the service, which displayed an altar with a gold cross on top. The army chaplain, Brigadier General Luther D. Miller, read the scripture from Isaiah 2:1–11, where swords are turned into plowshares. The war was now over and it was time to put away weapons and return to peaceful pursuits.

Keeping in the tradition of Roosevelt, and unlike that of President Eisenhower to follow, Truman generally preferred to keep his religion to himself. He had been a Sunday school attending Baptist all his life. Whereas later presidents would often urge coverage of their attendance at religious events, Truman was both more circumscribed and circumspect. Shortly after becoming president, for example, he went “unescorted except for Secret Service men” to church where he “was for the most part unnoticed [and most] of the hundreds of church members were unaware of the President’s presence.” Truman also avoided the flowery language of the Thanksgiving proclamations of his predecessors (and successors). Rather than invoking God’s blessings on American military and on peaceful endeavors, Truman said more simply, “May our Thanksgiving be tempered by humility, by sympathy for those who lack abundance and by compassion for those in want.” Truman also declined to resurrect the White House Easter egg roll for children, which had been set aside during the Roosevelt
administration. As the first Easter of his own administration approached in 1946, Truman was asked whether he might renew the Easter egg roll tradition. The practical man from the farm state of Missouri said “no,” because the “waste of so valuable a food product as eggs would not be consistent with the effort to feed starving millions.” In 1947, he declined to attend the traditional Memorial Day ceremony at Arlington because of pressing business, and he sent a representative in his place.

By 1948, however, Truman’s approach to prayer and religion had changed. Uncharacteristically for himself and for his immediate predecessors, Truman wrote a letter to religious leaders in a tone and with a message that was a dramatic departure from earlier years. He had identified a new source of evil in the world and he called upon Americans to help combat it by coming together for a “day of prayer and adoration.” The day he proposed was not the patriotic holidays of Memorial Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving Day, V-E Day, or V-J Day, but Good Friday, one of the most sacred days of the Christian calendar, the day that Jesus Christ was crucified. Truman’s unnamed enemy (though clearly referring to the Soviet Union and communism) was an “anti-religious” force whose specter was threatening world peace. In a letter to religious leaders Truman wrote:

We must always make spiritual values our main line of defense....Freedom of religion as well as the freedom and security of nations is seriously threatened by anti-religious forces....It is, therefore, necessary that all loyal American citizens join together to stem the tide of these evil forces by girding ourselves with the sword of faith and the armor of truth. [Because “Christians” in other lands are being persecuted,] we in the United States who still enjoy full religious liberty should commemorate this day in a solemn and sacred manner. For us, Good Friday should be a day of prayer and adoration, of sorrow and love, of forgiveness and assistance.

In his earlier calls for prayer, President Truman had not used the qualifier “loyal” before identifying “American citizens,” as if it had been assumed that they were. But increasingly, “loyalty” was something that could be recognized only after a thorough investigation. This new battle against evil was cast as a battle of faith against atheism and religious liberty versus religious persecution.

Two months after Truman’s 1948 Good Friday letter was released, Carl M. Saunders, the editor of the Jackson Citizen Patriot (based in Jackson, Michigan), published an article calling upon President Truman to urge all Americans not only to observe Memorial Day in honor of fallen soldiers, but to urge everyone to pray for peace at exactly the same moment on the same day. That suggestion seemed like a very good idea to the Michigan congressional delegation, and so Senator Homer Ferguson and Representative Earl C. Michener introduced legislation that was immediately adopted in both chambers. President Truman, in compliance with the congressional action, announced, on May 28, 1948, that 8:00 P.M. on Memorial Day would be a time set aside for “a universal prayer.” Unlike the preceding year, when he was too busy to leave the White House to attend the Memorial Day service at Arlington National Cemetery only two miles
away, Truman returned early from a sailing vacation in order to be able to attend the service.

Editor Saunders of Jackson, Michigan, now flush with the success of his proposal that sprinted in two short weeks from the wet ink of his hometown newspaper to the wet ink of the president’s pen in the Oval Office, decided to try his luck again. He published a second editorial on the same theme on February 20, 1949, entitled “First Things First,” lamenting that although Americans had set aside an entire day in November for Thanksgiving, “we have no day or hour or minute when as a people we turn to prayer. If we are largely a Christian nation, isn’t a national moment of prayer a logical course?” He was certain that differences in religious creeds would not be an objection to such a call for prayer, because all would be making “a common appeal to a common God.”

Not wishing overly to press his luck a second time, Saunders decided it would be a good idea to give Congress somewhat more than the two weeks he previously allocated for the enactment of the law, and so he published his editorial in February rather than in May. Although it took Congress longer to act the second time, Saunders was still on a roll. His article calling for a particular time for prayer on Memorial Day earned him the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing in 1950. Congress ultimately enacted a variation on his prize-winning proposal on May 11, 1950, that stated: “The President is requested to issue each year a proclamation... calling on the people of the United States to observe Memorial Day by praying, according to their individual religious faith, for permanent peace.” It was now law in the United States that Americans should pay for their military and pray for peace.

President Truman promptly satisfied the legislative request. Truman’s proclamation of May 23, 1950, called upon Americans to “pray for peace.” Noting that genuine peace had not emerged following World War II, the president said, “We feel the need of turning in humble supplicance to Almighty God for help and guidance.” This style is more akin to seeking guidance from God than boasting of God’s favor. The president further suggested that television and radio use their influence “to unite the nation in a universal prayer for permanent peace.” At the Memorial Day service at Arlington Cemetery that year, the former General and then Secretary of State George C. Marshall addressed the gathering. He offered his opinion about “the most important” issue confronting the world. It was not support for NATO, or a plan to provide reconstruction aid for the troubled economies of Europe, or the buildup in Soviet arms. According to General of the Army Marshall, the “most important thing for the world today, in my opinion, is a spiritual regeneration which would restore a feeling of good faith and good will among men generally.” Present in the audience to hear General Marshall speak was a special guest, Carl M. Saunders, the recipient of that year’s Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing.

Americans’ appetite for prayer proclamations was not yet sated. Pastor Earnest R. Palen of New York wanted the president to declare a national week of prayer. On July 14, 1950, the young and newly famous evangelist Billy
Graham met with Truman in the White House. According to *Time* magazine, Graham arrived “agleam in a pistachio-colored suit and white shoes” at the meeting where he warned Truman “that the U.S. people are gripped by ‘a fear you could almost called hysteria,’” after which he proposed that “the President proclaim a national day of prayer and humiliation.” Truman was annoyed by the effrontery of the young evangelist and his colleagues who, after meeting with the president, obliged the waiting photographers by conspicuously kneeling in prayer with the White House as the backdrop. While the photographs of Billy Graham praying on the White House lawn may have uplifted the spirits of the majority of those who saw them in newspapers throughout the country, the president was not amused and banned Graham from further White House visits. The prohibition on White House visits by Billy Graham would be lifted, permanently, once Eisenhower came into office.

Later in 1950, the president appeared finally to have had enough of prayer proclamations after Representative F. Edward Hébert, a Democrat who fiercely opposed Truman’s civil rights efforts, piously called upon the president to designate the Sunday before Christmas as a day for “country-wide prayer.” In response, Truman wrote a “private” letter—obviously destined for wide distribution—describing the Congressman as a hypocrite in calling for another day of prayer after he had engaged in some particularly nasty political activities. But Truman was not destined to win this battle between personal hypocrisy and public piety. After several religious leaders announced their support for the congressman’s proposal, President Truman was asked at his December 19 press conference whether he would proclaim Christmas as a day to pray for peace. The president relented and said he would do it. Two days later, December 22, the Senate approved a previously adopted House resolution calling for a national day of prayer on Christmas.

Truman did not escape his presidency with mandated prayer proclamations limited to Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Congress had not adjourned from the prayer business. On April 17, 1952, two months after Billy Graham preached a sermon on the steps of the Capitol building urging the president to set aside a day of prayer, Congress enacted yet another law that now reads (as amended during the Reagan administration): “The President shall issue each year a proclamation designating the first Thursday in May as a National Day of Prayer on which the people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation at churches, in groups, and as individuals.” Although the Sermon on the Mount had condemned those who wish to be seen praying in public, the U.S. Congress enacted a law designed to promote exactly that.

Eisenhower’s Judeo-Christian America

Three days before Christmas, 1952, President-elect Eisenhower gave a speech at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel (the same hotel where the “Waldorf Statement” blacklisting the “Hollywood Ten” had been issued in December five years
earlier). According to the only available transcript of the speech, Eisenhower declared:

Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is. With us [Americans] of course it is the Judo-Christian [sic] concept.\textsuperscript{24}

The first sentence is one of the most oft-cited quotations used to characterize not only Eisenhower’s attitudes to religion, but to those of Americans as a whole during the 1950s. Many Americans believe that the success of the United States is premised on the existence of God and General Eisenhower obliged by assuring them it was true. Eisenhower advised the 1955 American Legion “Back to God” program: “Without God, there could be no American form of government, nor an American way of life. Thus the Founding Fathers saw it and thus, with God’s help, it will continue to be.”\textsuperscript{25} To skeptical observers, however, the phrase “deeply felt religious faith” seems to have a polar opposite meaning from “and I don’t care what it is.” Professor William Lee Miller, an early and influential critic of “piety along the Potomac” famously summed up this first sentence as meaning that “President Eisenhower, like many Americans, is a very fervent believer in a very vague religion.”\textsuperscript{26} For other observers of the Eisenhower era, including notably Will Herberg, Sydney Mead, and Martin Marty—but many others as well—these words exemplify the vacuity of Eisenhower’s official religion and perhaps that of the entire 1950s writ large.\textsuperscript{27}

There has been something of an effort to rescue Eisenhower from the accusation that he was promoting religious pabulum, by pointing to the less cited second sentence of the quotation: “With us [Americans] of course it is the Judo-Christian [sic] concept.”\textsuperscript{28} In other words, it might be argued, Eisenhower was not simply referring to a bland and generic religion but to the more meaningful and specific “Judeo-Christian concept” of religion. Even putting aside the fact that the transcript quotes Eisenhower as saying “Judo-Christian” rather than “Judeo-Christian” (perhaps the general had confused western “muscular Christianity” with an eastern martial arts “Judo-Christianity”), the form of religion that Eisenhower consistently advocated in public speeches throughout his presidency did not call upon Americans to repent, to give up all they had and to follow Christ, or to love the Lord their God with all their heart, might, mind, and strength. Eisenhower did not use “Judeo-Christian” to refer to any specific theological creeds. He, like others in the 1950s, had begun to use the term as a shorthand expression for a generic American religion in a way roughly equivalent to “Bible believing” or “Protestant-Catholic-Jew” (as was the title of Will Herberg’s book first published in 1955). In a related way, it became common for Eisenhower and others in the 1950s to refer to the “Judeo-Christian founding of America” as a favored way of referring to the Bible-based religious heritage of the country. To the extent that the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century founders of America relied on the Bible, they relied on an explicitly Christian and triumphalist interpretation of the Old Testament and they did not look to Jews
or to the Hebrew Bible to find common roots. Ultimately, when used by Eisenhower, the term appealed not to the depths of faith, but to a “common denominator” religion. It was less that the country was actually *founded* on “Judeo-Christian” principles and more that during the 1950s it became commonplace for people *to say* that it was.\(^{29}\)

**Let Us Pray Some More...**

General Dwight D. Eisenhower was sworn in as president of the United States on January 20, 1953. The first words spoken by the newly inaugurated president after taking the oath of office were the following:

> My friends, before I begin the expression of those thoughts that I deem appropriate to this moment, would you permit me the privilege of uttering a little private prayer of my own. And I ask that you bow your heads:

> Almighty God, as we stand here at this moment my future associates in the executive branch of government join me in beseeching that Thou will make full and complete our dedication to the service of the people in this throng, and their fellow citizens everywhere. Give us, we pray, the power to discern clearly right from wrong, and allow all our words and actions to be governed thereby, and by the laws of this land. Especially we pray that our concern shall be for all the people regardless of station, race, or calling. May cooperation be permitted and be the mutual aim of those who, under the concepts of our Constitution, hold to differing political faiths; so that all may work for the good of our beloved country and Thy glory. Amen.

That the president of the United States would describe this prayer, delivered to thousands of people assembled in front of him at the Capitol building and to millions of Americans on live national television, as “private” suggests the blurring of a meaningful distinction between the words “public” and “private.” But the majority of the listeners in January 1953 probably found the prayer to be comforting and perhaps even inspiring (rather than troubling or worrisome). On that inaugural day, Eisenhower did not belong to any church and had apparently never been baptized. It seems that few people found anything inappropriate in an unchurched former general asking that they bow their heads and let him lead them in prayer. For example, on the first Saturday after the inauguration, Rabbi Samuel Segal in New York delivered a sermon praising Eisenhower and his new administration that “in freedom will inspire others to become free to reap a harvest of brotherhood under the spiritual sovereignty of God.”\(^{30}\) This is very generic religion and it seemed to go a long way.

Eisenhower was the first president to offer a prayer at his inaugural address but was not the last.\(^{31}\) In previous years it had been traditional for a president-elect to attend a private prayer service at a church in Washington on the morning of the inauguration. Government-sponsored and politician-participant prayers were about to become both fashionable and pervasive, and they would increasingly be used by government officials for political if not pious purposes. Presidents
would, with increasing frequency, conclude major political addresses with phrases such as “God bless America,” “God bless you,” and “God bless the American people.” As we shall see below, Eisenhower’s very public “little private prayer” was only the first of several instances where the president was either the first president to introduce a religious (or quasi-religious) practice or to revive a lapsed practice that would thereafter become traditional.

The first president to offer a prayer at his inauguration had shown little interest in religion before he decided to make a run for the presidency in 1952, although he described himself as “the most intensely religious person I know.” In his bestselling book about World War II, Crusade in Europe (published in 1948), Eisenhower mentioned neither religion, God’s role in the affairs of the world, prayers, morality, or anything about the vital importance of a “deeply felt religious faith”—themes that he was about to launch in his presidential campaign and that would continue throughout his presidency. (Eisenhower’s post-presidential memoirs, Mandate for Change and Waging Peace, like his earlier book about World War II, similarly mentioned nothing about the importance of a “deeply felt religious faith” for America.) Later in his life, Eisenhower personally selected historian Stephen E. Ambrose to be his official biographer. After spending decades poring over the general’s life and thought, Ambrose ultimately devoted only one paragraph of his 2-volume, 1500-page biography to Eisenhower’s religious beliefs and attitudes. Ambrose concluded that “theology was a subject about which he knew nothing and cared nothing; he never discussed his idea of God with anyone; he did talk, sincerely and earnestly, about the need for a spiritual force in American life, but the specific form that the religious content should take did not concern him.”

But in 1952, while he served as the supreme allied commander at NATO and as he began to contemplate his campaign for the presidency, the general began to talk more about the importance of religion. Eisenhower welcomed to his headquarters in France in early 1952 the Reverend Billy Graham, who had just completed his highly successful “Crusade in Washington.” According to Graham’s autobiography, the general, who was not baptized and did not belong to any church, “confessed that he and his wife, Mamie, rarely attended military chapel services, even during wartime.” He also confessed to having strayed from the religious teachings of his youth. While simultaneously looking at the five-star general’s uniform and overlooking Ike’s admission of having had little involvement with religion since his youth, the Reverend Graham nevertheless saw something deeply inspiring in the general. Graham reports that he told the future president that the “American people have come to the point where they want a man with honesty, integrity, and spiritual power.” As time went by, the preacher said of Eisenhower that he became “more and more impressed with his character and the intensity of his growing faith, which he not only formally confessed but also applied to policies and programs.” Although Eisenhower belonged to no religion and had not even declared which political party he belonged to, Graham, like the majority of Americans, saw in the World War II hero exactly the right spiritual and moral
qualities that the United States needed in the 1950s. Graham found in Eisenhower the spiritual qualities that he wanted to find in Eisenhower.

The fact that Eisenhower did not belong to any church at the time he was elected president was cured immediately after the inauguration. On Sunday, February 1, 1953, a week and a half after being sworn into office, Eisenhower made a seven-block trek from the White House to the National Presbyterian Church on Connecticut Avenue where he had a meeting with the church’s minister, the Reverend Dr. Edward Lee Roy Elson. Following their meeting, the minister baptized the president of the United States. Later Elson offered the media an assessment of the president’s spiritual life that was remarkably similar to that which Billy Graham had made a year earlier in Europe. According to Elson, Eisenhower was a “man of simple faith, who is sincere in his religious doctrine.” The press reported Elson’s observation about the president’s faith but did not report that the same Reverend Elson had formerly been a U.S. Army chaplain in Europe during and following World War II, where he had risen to the rank of colonel. Colonel Elson’s commanding officer in Europe was, of course, none other than the supreme allied commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower.36 The following year Elson published America’s Spiritual Recovery, which included an introduction by J. Edgar Hoover (another Elson parishioner), who wrote for the introduction: “We can see all too clearly the devastating effects of Secularism on our Christian way of life. The period when it was smart to ‘debunk’ our traditions undermined... high standards of conduct.”37 The public messages of Elson and J. Edgar Hoover coincided nicely with Eisenhower’s own beliefs. According to Stephen Ambrose, “He felt it important for the President to set an example. He did not think the denomination important.”38 In Mandate for Change, Eisenhower noted simply that he wanted to convey his “deep faith in the beneficence of the Almighty... I was seeking a way to point out that we were getting too secular.”39

The link between God, America, the military, and public piety was solidified further that same Sunday afternoon. The American Legion, the large veterans’ association, broadcast a nationwide television program launching its new “Back to God” program. The two featured speakers were the recently inaugurated president and vice president of the United States. In his prerecorded statement, the president—who could not be in New York because he was being baptized in Washington—expressed his hope that Americans’ dedication to God would be sufficient to justify all the material blessings that he had given them.

But when we think about the matter very deeply, we know that the blessings we are really thankful for are a different type. They are what our forefathers called our rights: the right to worship as we please, to speak and think and earn and to save. Those are the rights we must strive mightily to merit. [These rights] are the genius of our democracy. It is the very basis of the cause for which so many of our fellow-citizens have died.40

After having thought about the matter “very deeply,” the newly baptized president assured the “Back to God” television audience that rights including
those of worshiping, earning, and saving are part of the “genius of our democracy” and that we should acknowledge the brave Americans who give their lives that we might be able to have them.

Vice President Nixon, who was in New York for the live broadcast of “Back to God,” advised the viewers that “the great asset” that the United States had in its fight with communism abroad was its spiritual heritage. “Our spiritual strength is our greatest advantage over those who are trying to enslave the world.” This is what will give the United States the strength to prevail over foreign enemies. “The privilege of free worship, our greatest defense against enemies from without, is a privilege that must be used.” One of the “great privileges” that Americans recently “enjoyed” was that “of hearing President Eisenhower pray at the beginning of his inauguration. . . . That could not happen in half the world today.” He cautioned, however, that these privileges should not be taken for granted. The “moral decay from within had destroyed more nations than armed force from without.” According to Richard Nixon, it was our spiritual values, and especially prayer, that would be our “greatest defense.”

The director of religious broadcasting for the U.S. government-owned Voice of America (VOA), Roger Lyons, balked at rebroadcasting internationally this “Back to God” program, which he characterized as “drivel.” An influential U.S. senator was so disturbed that a VOA official might make such a comment about the president and vice president’s praise of American freedoms that he opened an investigation into Mr. Lyons’s private life including his religious beliefs. Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, chairman of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, obtained the testimony of a former girlfriend of Lyons who stated that she believed Lyons was an atheist. McCarthy then brought Lyons before a public hearing of the subcommittee. In his own defense, Lyons assured the members that “I am not an atheist. I am not an agnostic. I believe in God.” To buttress his assertion, he advised that he had attended a Lutheran church service within the last month and while there had contributed $10.00.

Lyons was not the only VOA official whose religious beliefs became a matter of sworn testimony. During the same month that President Eisenhower praised the right of worship as being the “genius of our democracy” and that the vice president warned of the dangers of “moral decay from within,” Senator McCarthy questioned the religious beliefs of another witness, Mr. Troup Matthews, who was the assistant chief of the French unit of the VOA. Matthews had been accused of publicly stating that he would hire only atheists and agnostics to work for him at the VOA (an accusation that on its face seems completely preposterous). After Matthews, who had lost his leg in combat in the U.S. Army, flatly denied the allegation, Chairman McCarthy asked the witness the following questions:

The CHAIRMAN: Let me ask you this. Are you either an agnostic or an atheist?

Mr. Matthews: No sir, by no definition I know of, sir.
The CHAIRMAN: Do you regularly attend any church? I am not asking what church.

Mr. Matthews: No, not frequently, at the present time.

The CHAIRMAN: You do not? How long have you been in any church to attend services? Again I am not asking what church. How long have you been in any church, or synagogue.

Mr. Matthews: I would say roughly a year, sir.

The CHAIRMAN: And then, roughly how long before that?

Mr. Matthews: I am not a frequent attender at church.

The CHAIRMAN: I understand. In view of this charge that you wanted people who had no religious beliefs, I am just curious to know whether you do attend church. You understand, I am not criticizing you for not attending.

Mr. Matthews: I understand that.

After repeatedly assuring the witness that his personal religious beliefs were his own business and that the question were designed solely as a check to see if there might be evidence in his personal life to rebut the charge, McCarthy immediately switched to another line of questions.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you ever joined the Communist party?

Mr. Matthews: No, sir.

The CHAIRMAN: Or the Young Communist League?

Mr. Matthews: No, sir.

While Senator McCarthy was cross-examining witnesses testifying under oath about their private religious beliefs and practices, President Eisenhower was publicly engaging in prayer. Although the inaugural prayer was Eisenhower’s first prayer innovation as president, it was not his last. He inaugurated the practice of beginning cabinet meetings with a “moment of silent prayer.” Prior to 1953, some senators and members of Congress had held private Congressional “prayer breakfasts” on Capitol Hill that had been limited only to elected members of the legislature. After Eisenhower suggested he was interested in attending, the private conclave was transformed into the very public “Presidential Prayer Breakfast.” The first such breakfast was held on February 5, 1953 at the luxurious Mayflower Hotel, only two blocks from the church where Eisenhower had been baptized four days earlier. The expenses were paid by the hotel’s owner, Conrad Hilton, who insisted that Billy Graham be a speaker and that no expense be spared to turn the prayer breakfast into a celebrated activity in Washington. The Presidential Prayer Breakfast became an annual event, and Billy Graham was a participant at the first 12. Subsequently renamed the “National Prayer Breakfast,” once a year it now feeds thousands of government officials,
high-ranking military officers, religious leaders, Wall street financiers, lobbyists, diplomats, movie stars, and other celebrities. Tickets to the annual event, where politicians like to be seen praying, are highly prized. The president of the United States is almost always one of the featured guests.47

President Eisenhower and Billy Graham spoke at the first Presidential Prayer Breakfast in February of 1953. While it is not surprising that the president’s (apparently) extemporaneous remarks emphasized God and the value of prayer, it is perhaps notable that he focused, virtually exclusively, on the political usefulness of God and prayer for the United States.48 Eisenhower did not discuss, for example, how prayer can help us learn the ways of God, or give us insights into salvation, or help us repent of our sins, or impress upon us the love and grace of God. Rather, he began his remarks by suggesting that everyone in attendance understood the need for “help which comes from outside ourselves,” but the help that is needed is not for personal salvation or repentance but to help address the really tough problems that government officials confront on a daily basis.

Every free government is imbedded soundly in a deeply-felt religious faith or it makes no sense. Today if we recall those things and if, in that sense, we can back off from our problems and depend upon a power greater than ourselves, I believe that we begin to draw these problems into focus.

As Benjamin Franklin said at one time during the course of the stormy consultation at the Constitutional Convention, because he sensed that the convention was on the point of breaking up: “Gentlemen, I suggest that we have a word of prayer.” And strangely enough, after a bit of prayer the problems began to smooth out and the convention moved to the great triumph that we enjoy today—the writing of our Constitution.

...But if we can back off from those problems and make the effort, then there is something that ties us all together. We have begun in our grasp of that basis of understanding, which is that all free government is firmly founded in a deeply-felt religious faith....

I think my little message this morning is merely this: I have the profound belief that if we remind ourselves once in a while of this simple basic truth that our forefathers in 1776 understood so well, we can hold up our heads and be certain that we in our time are going to be able to preserve the essentials, to preserve as a free government and pass it on, in our turn, as sound, as strong, as good as ever. That, it seems to me, is the prayer that all of us have today.

In his address, Eisenhower twice used the term that he had frequently employed: “deeply-held (or deeply-felt) religious faith,” just as he had in his Waldorf-Astoria speech in December 1952.49 But what did this mean? The president did not link “deeply-felt faith” to transcendence, or immanence, or imminence, or burning belief, or a life-transforming spiritual experience, or repentance. “Deeply-felt religious faith” apparently was to be understood in a way similar to what “private little prayer” meant at his inauguration. What Eisenhower expressed was not private (it was before an audience of millions), and “deeply-felt religion” had nothing to with an intense inner experience, but both had a
great deal to do with public professions about the importance of religion to the
American political system and to the American way of life. Billy Graham was
sitting next to Eisenhower when the president delivered the prayer breakfast
message. Graham might have said in response, “Mr. President, prayer and God
are not about the political interests of United States, they are about salvation by
faith in Jesus Christ.” But Graham did not notice any irregularities in what the
president of the United States had said. Indeed, in his many observations about
Eisenhower, Graham, like the Reverend Elson, saw the general as a man of sim-
ple but profound faith. Graham and Elson became Eisenhower’s “preferred”
spiritual advisers.

From a biblical or theological perspective, Eisenhower’s comments about reli-
gion at the Presidential Prayer Breakfast were not illuminating. But for the
American appetite, Ike’s “simple expressions of faith” seem to have been deeply
satisfying.

The Eisenhower administration’s participation in religious innovations did not
end with the inauguration, his subsequent baptism, or the Presidential Prayer
Breakfast. Eisenhower, like President Truman towards the end of his
administration, also issued a Good Friday message. He praised Christ who “must
and ever will inspire mankind’s quest for peace.” He also praised the plans of
religious leaders to sponsor a three-hour ecumenical service observing Good
Friday, which he felt would “deepen our awareness of these timeless lessons of
Calvary.” His publicly announced plan to attend the service was duly noted
(“about 200 people gathered outside the church to see the President”), though
he did not stay for the entire 3 hours to hear the “timeless” message but left after
only 40 minutes. Three days later, the White House Easter egg roll, which had
been suspended during the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, was
reinstated. Eisenhower himself participated in the egg roll with considerably
more gusto than the church service. The packed event on the White House lawn
was described as a “mob scene.” The New York Times published a photograph
of a huge crowd pressing on Eisenhower and illustrated the effect his presence
had on the crowd ostensibly celebrating the resurrection of Christ by quoting
one woman as shouting “I touched him! I touched him.” To which another
person responded, “What’s the matter with these folks—he’s just a human
man.”

Like Truman, Eisenhower received repeated entreaties to declare days of
prayer. Probably the most famous Catholic in the country, the Reverend Fulton
J. Sheen, a radio and television personality who had recently won an Emmy for
his broadcasts emphasizing anticommunism, also urged the president to declare
a national day of prayer. Shortly thereafter, the 95,000-strong Knights of Colum-
bus (who were at the time urging that “under God” be added to the Pledge of
Allegiance and who were among the strongest supporters of Senator Joseph
McCarthy) did likewise. For the first time, a president declared the Fourth of
July (1953) a “national day of prayer,” for which he was applauded by the New
York Times: “President Eisenhower made a sharp break with a very old tradition
when he asked that we make this Independence Day a national day of prayer.”  

Rather than question his motives, the New York Times editorial found the president’s suggestion to be “thoughtful and earnest” and concluded that the Fourth of July “call to devotion is appropriate.”  

Francis Cardinal Spellman, the primate of the Catholic Church and the most powerful Catholic in America, also praised the president for his Independence Day decision. The cardinal found that it was “typical of President Eisenhower to turn to God in humble acknowledgement of America’s debt of gratitude for the manifold blessings we have received and in fervent petition for continuing protection.”  

Two of the most important religious leaders in the country, Catholic Cardinal Spellman and Protestant Evangelist Graham, were impressed by the deep spirituality of the recently baptized president. They were particularly impressed by his having recognized that the founding of America was the consequence of a divine plan. It was as if President Eisenhower had the uncanny ability to grasp the truth that God had sent his only begotten son into the world to celebrate the Fourth of July and to enjoy the American way of life.  

The year came full circle when Eisenhower attended the second annual Presidential Prayer Breakfast in February 1954, though this time he was excused from speaking to the 600 attendees, who were addressed instead by the new Chief Justice Earl Warren. The chief justice “spoke of the United States as ‘a Christian land governed by Christian principles’ and as ‘a beacon light of faith’ for all the world.”  

His words were almost identical to those expressed by the president the year before in the same ballroom in the same Mayflower Hotel:  

I believe no one can read the history of our country...without realizing that the Good Book and the spirit of the Saviour have from the beginning been our guiding geniuses....Whether we look to the first Charter of Virginia...or to the Charter of New England...or to the Charter of Massachusetts Bay...or to the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut...the same objective is present: a Christian land governed by Christian principles....I like to believe we are living today in the spirit of the Christian religion. I like also to believe that as long as we do so, no great harm can come to our country.  

The prayer breakfast attendees had learned from both the highest judicial and political authorities in the land: history tells us that God played a role in founding the United States and that as long as the country adheres to Christianity it will be able to repel foreign threats.  

Prayer chapels, prayer proclamations, days of prayer, and prayer breakfasts flourished throughout the Eisenhower presidency. In July 1955, the president issued a nationwide appeal for all of his fellow citizens to join him in a prayer for success in the upcoming Big Four conference (Soviet Union, France, Britain, and the United States) in Geneva, the first direct meeting between the heads of state from the east and west since Yalta. The country responded enthusiastically with hundreds of thousands of people attending churches and synagogues in response to the request.  

At the beginning of Eisenhower’s second term, in
January of 1957, the president and Mrs. Eisenhower traveled a few blocks from the White House to Constitution Hall to commemorate the “little private prayer” that he had delivered at his first inauguration. The Howard University Choir sang the words of the prayer, which had been set to music by the chairman of the president’s Committee for Arts and Sciences.63

One Nation Under God

On Sunday morning, February 7, 1954, three days after hearing Chief Justice Warren declare that the United States is a “Christian land governed by Christian principles,” President Dwight Eisenhower left the White House to attend services at nearby New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. The church had long been a place of worship for presidents—including President Lincoln who was being honored that day—and had been rebuilt after 1951 following President Truman’s speech at the cornerstone-laying ceremony (discussed in Chapter 2). With President Eisenhower in the congregation, the Reverend George M. Docherty gave a sermon where he lamented that the Pledge of Allegiance, as constituted at that time, contained no reference to God. According to a reporter in the congregation, the sermon declared that without a reference to God

the pledge ignores a “definitive factor in the American way of life.” . . . Belief in God is this distinguishing factor, the minister declared, and the pledge, in failing to note it, could serve “as the pledge of any republic.” . . . [“An] atheistic American is a contradiction in terms. . . . If you deny the Christian ethic, you fall short of the American ideal of life.”64

The minister went on to emphasize that the American way of life was “something more” than “going to a ballgame, and eating popcorn, and drinking Cola-cola [sic].” Rather, it is

“gardens without fences to bar you from the neighborliness of your Neighbor. . . . It is the lonely proud statue of Lee on the Gettysburg battlefield. . . . It is a lad and lass looking at you intently in the marriage service. . . . It is a freedom that respects the rights of minorities but is defined by a fundamental belief in God. . . . Today this way of life . . . is threatened by modern, secularized godless humanity,” or communism.

When queried about Docherty’s proposal by reporters waiting outside the church, President Eisenhower praised the sermon and immediately agreed that it would be a good idea to make the change and add “under God.” Later that day in the American Legion’s nationally televised “Back to God” program, General Eisenhower said that he approved of “ex-soldiers” sponsoring such an initiative because “there are no atheists in the foxholes.” In times of trial, Americans “instinctively turn to God for new courage and peace of mind. All the history of America bears witness to this truth.” Indeed, “faith is our surest strength, our greatest resource.”65 Although the president did not refer to the sermon he had heard that morning, the American Legion sponsors of the broadcast had long been supporters of adding the two words.
Congress rushed to make the addition and within a few short weeks the Pledge of Allegiance was amended by statute. As they prepared to declare by law that the United States was “one nation under God,” hearings were held that allowed members of Congress to speak about the importance of making the change. The very short Senate report found that “one of the greatest differences between the free world and the Communists [is] a belief in God. . . .” Adding a total of eight letters in two words “will enable us to strike a blow against those who would enslave us.”66 The report of the House of Representatives, which also asserted that the United States would be more secure against its enemies if “under God” were added to the Pledge, offered an additional religious justification:

Our American Government is founded on the concept of the individuality and the dignity of the human being. Underlying this concept is the belief that the human person is important because he was created by God and endowed by Him with certain inalienable rights which no civil authority may usurp. The inclusion of God in our pledge therefore would further acknowledge the dependence of our people and our Government upon the moral directions of the Creator.67

The Senate and House reports also cited the Mayflower Compact (referring to the ship that transported the pilgrims and not the hotel that launched the prayer breakfasts) as compelling historical evidence of America’s having been providentially inspired. The two congressional reports did not, however, mention the early Massachusetts settlers’ disquieting calls upon their fellow men to repent of their sins or risk eternal damnation. The members of Congress contemplated instead a much more agreeable and complacent religion that readily linked the American flag, the U.S. Constitution, the admirable moral character of Americans, and a beneficent God that appropriately bestows blessings on his favored land. “Since our flag is symbolic of our nation, its constitutional government and the morality of our people, the committee believes it most appropriate that the concept of God be included in the recitations of the pledge of allegiance to the flag.”68

Congressman Louis C. Rabaut of Michigan, the chief sponsor in the House of Representatives, testified that the addition would help the American people “be more alerted to the true meaning of our country and its form of government.”69 The representative from Michigan declared that “Our country was born under God and only [under God] will it live as a citadel of freedom.”70 Congressman O’Hara added that “What we are engaged in today is a sacred mission.”71 Democratic Congressman Peter Rodino appealed to the Christian military tradition: “Since the days of Constantine and his standard, ‘In this sign thou shalt conquer,’ nations and governments have relied for their strength on trust in God, and, in peace and war, have placed their confidence in a resolution to do His will.”72 In his signing statement, President Eisenhower proudly declared that:

From this day forward, the millions of our school children will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural schoolhouse, the dedication of our nation and our people to the Almighty. To anyone who truly loves America, nothing
could be more inspiring than to contemplate this rededication of our youth, on each school morning, to our country’s true heritage.

Especially is this meaningful as we regard today’s world. Over the globe, mankind has been cruelly torn by violence and brutality and, by the millions, deadened in mind and soul by a materialistic philosophy of life. Man everywhere is appalled by the prospect of atomic war. In this somber setting, this law and its effect today have profound meaning. In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America’s heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country’s most powerful resource, in peace or in war. 73

Thus the American flag, the Pledge, God, and country had all been united—and those who truly love America will weave all together in their minds. Immediately after the new law was signed, several members of Congress walked outside to the front steps of the Capitol building and solemnly pledged allegiance to the flag and to “one nation under God” while CBS broadcast the event on television. 74

A Prayer Room in the Capitol Building

In 1954, the U.S. Congress adopted a joint resolution to require the construction of a nondenominational prayer room in the Capitol building that would be designed for individual use and not for public services. 75 Overseen by an interreligious advisory panel, the chapel opened in March 1955. The joint resolution authorizing the construction required that “no symbol used would give offense to members of any church, and at the same time incorporate in the fabric and decoration of the room the basic unity of belief in God and His providence that has characterized our history.” The chapel did not, and does not, include a cross. It does include two candelabra, an altar, the American flag, the Bible, and two vases “constantly filled with fresh flowers” that “tell of the beauty of God’s world.” 76 One stained glass window depicts Washington, on bended knee, praying along side the message “This Nation Under God.” 77 In his history of the Senate chaplaincy, Senator Robert Byrd interpreted this as “George Washington, representing the people of America at prayer.” 78 The original pamphlet that described the prayer room stated, incorrectly, that the drafters of the Constitution began their meeting with prayer. There are also some decidedly non-biblical and classical references in the prayer room: the pyramid with the eye (which also is on the one dollar bill) and the Great Seal of the United States, as well as the phrases taken from the eighteenth-century founders: “Annuit Coeptis” and “Novus Ordo Seclorum.” 79 Curiously, the iconography of the prayer room does not include the phrase “in God we trust,” but this is not because the issue was absent from the minds of members of Congress.

“In God We Trust”

During the Eisenhower administration, the U.S. Congress enacted two laws that first required placing “In God We Trust” on paper currency and coins
(1955) and that then made it the national motto of the United States (1956). Before the 1950s, the phrase linking “God” and “trust” had been made during the War of 1812 in “The Star-Spangled Banner” and later “In God We Trust” was placed on the two-cent coin during the Civil War. Like the idea to insert “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance, the idea to require “In God We Trust” on all paper currency and coins also originated in a Sunday morning church service. While watching money being put in a collection plate on Sunday, November 1, 1953, an Arkansas, a coin collector named Matt Rothert suddenly realized to his dismay that although the phrase “In God We Trust” appeared on most (though not all) coins, it was totally absent on paper money. Immediately after this November 1953 church service in Camden, Arkansas, Rothert sat down and wrote letters not only to his own senator, J.W. Fulbright (who coincidentally was about to become chairman of the Senate Banking and Currency Committee), but also to the secretary of the treasury, to President Eisenhower, and to several newspapers and magazines. In his letter to the president, Mr. Rothert offered one and only one reason for adding the phrase: “The addition of this motto in the proper place on our paper money at this time would be a forward step in our international relations.” The numismatist from Arkansas did not elaborate why adding the phrase would be a positive step in American foreign relations, apparently believing that it was sufficiently self-evident that it need not be articulated. He later was quoted as suggesting that the reason was because American bills circulate throughout the world and that, as people rely on the value of the dollar, it would be good for foreigners to know that the people of the United States themselves ultimately rely on God.

Many Americans thought that putting God’s name on paper money was a splendid idea, though one former president had denounced an earlier suggestion to do the same thing as a sacrilege, irreverent, and as cheapening God. In 1907, when some were urging that “In God We Trust” be put on the 10-dollar gold coin, President Theodore Roosevelt argued against the proposal in strenuous terms:

My own feeling in the matter is due to my very firm conviction that to put such a motto on coins, or to use it in any kindred manner, not only does no good but does positive harm, and is in effect irreverence, which comes dangerously close to sacrilege. A beautiful and solemn sentence such as the one in question should be treated and uttered only with that fine reverence which necessarily implies a certain exalation of spirit.

Any use which tends to cheapen it and above all any use which tends to secure its being treated in a spirit of levity, is from every standpoint profoundly to be regretted. It is a motto which it is indeed well to have inscribed on our great national monuments, in our temples of justice, in our legislative halls, and in building such as those at West Point and Annapolis—in short, wherever it will tend to arouse and inspire a lofty emotion in those who look thereon.

But it seems to me eminently unwise to cheapen such a motto by use on coins, just as it would be to cheapen it by use on postage stamps, or in advertisements.
Republican President Roosevelt nevertheless lost the debate to the Republican-controlled Congress and “God” was ordered the following year to be placed on the coin of the realm. 

Ignoring the concern that putting “God” on money cheapened God rather than raised the value of the dollar, Congress moved ahead with three separate bills in 1954 to accomplish the goal of ensuring that space for God would be reserved on all U.S. paper currency. On the first day that Congress met in 1954, Representative Charles E. Bennett of Florida introduced H.R. 619. Arguing for inserting the phrase on both paper money and coins, the congressman pointed to communist threats from abroad as a compelling reason for enacting the law.

In these days when imperialistic and materialistic communism seeks to attack and destroy freedom, we should continuously look for ways to strengthen the foundations of our freedom. At the base of our freedom is our faith in God and the desire of Americans to live by His will and by His guidance. As long as this country trusts in God, it will prevail. To serve as a constant reminder of this truth, it is highly desirable that our currency and coins should bear these inspiring words, “In God We Trust.”

The bill easily sailed through Congress with but one tongue-in-cheek foreign policy concern raised by Congressman Harold Gross from the farm state of Iowa, who “wonder[ed] if American currency with the inscription ‘In God We Trust’ will be acceptable in Communist Poland in payment for the canned hams that are pouring into this country in competition with American farmers and packers.” Gross, who had himself been a farmer before being elected to Congress, would have been delighted if the atheistic Poles refused to accept dollars with “God” on them as long as it kept them from exporting tins filled with cheap ham from Poland. At its annual convention in 1954, the American Legion endorsed the idea of placing the phrase on the dollar bill in the same platform in which it “strongly” commended Senator McCarthy’s investigations.

H.R. 619 did not move through Congress with quite as much speed as the contemporaneous legislation inserting “under God” into the Pledge of Allegiance or the bill requiring the construction of the prayer room in the Capitol building. But by June of 1955, with the new prayer room having been open for almost three months, the House and Senate adopted the new law. Since that time, with the exception of one inadvertent printer’s omission of the phrase (which thrilled numismatists like Matt Rothert), all new engraving plates since 1957 have borne the inscription “In God We Trust.”

Between the time that Rothert wrote to Senator Fulbright and President Eisenhower in November 1953 and the time that the currency law was adopted in 1955, the U.S. Postal Service also rejected President Theodore Roosevelt’s advice by issuing a Statue of Liberty stamp bearing, for the first time, the inscription “In God We Trust.” The issuance of the eight-cent stamp was of such national significance that the launching ceremony was presided over by no less a figure than the president of the United States, and it was of sufficient national
importance that it was broadcast on national television. Eight cents was the cost of sending an airmail letter overseas. Just as Mr. Rothert wanted foreigners to see that God was on our money, the postal service wanted foreigners to see that God was on our stamps. In 1956, the post office also brought prayers as well to the mail by introducing a new postmark that said concisely “Pray for Peace.”

The appetite of Congress and the American people for declarations about God had not yet been sated. Congressman Charles Bennett, while promoting his currency bill, learned to his dismay that the United States did not yet have an official motto. He thereupon introduced a bill to make “In God We Trust” the official national motto of the United States. In his testimony before the House Judiciary Committee, on February 24, 1956, Congressman Bennett argued in support of his bill that:

More than any other phrase it expresses the spiritual and moral values upon which our country was founded and upon which it depends for survival. In these days when imperialism and materialism seek to attack and destroy freedom, we should continually look for ways to strengthen the foundations of our freedom.

Bennett admitted that there were three rival candidates for the national motto, each of which originated in the eighteenth century and that had a legitimate competing claim: “Annuit Coeptis,” “Novus Ordo Seclorum,” and “E Pluribus Unum.” He argued, however, for the primacy of “In God We Trust” on the grounds that it had been placed on coins since the Civil War, that Congress had recently adopted it for paper money, and that the phrase appears (almost) in “The Star-Spangled Banner.” As with the Reverend Docherty’s “argument” that the pre-“under God” pledge was so generic that little Muscovites could have said it, the arguments of Congressmen Bennett are difficult to credit logically because the three obvious contenders had not only been used by the founders themselves in the eighteenth century, all three also appeared on the Great Seal of the United States (adopted during the founders’ generation), and they also had long-appeared on currency. Regardless of whether Congressman Bennett’s arguments were logically compelling, he was on the right wave of history. The U.S. Congress, now well-versed in voting for laws affirming God’s existence, quickly approved the bill that he introduced on March 22, 1956 and sent it off to President Eisenhower, who signed it into law on July 30.

The Decade of Decalogues

Other Americans during the 1950s were similarly concerned about the dangers of spiritual decline and the threat of communism—and suggested that the widespread distribution of the Ten Commandments could help give the United States the spiritual uplift that was needed to battle its atheistic foes. Billy Graham’s services in 1949 and 1950 reminisced about the days “when this country claimed the Ten Commandments as the basis for our moral code.” In May 1950, Rabbi Alexander Burnstein proposed at an interfaith breakfast in New York City that
nations, and not just individuals, should obey the Ten Commandments. In January 1951, another New York rabbi proposed that the Ten Commandments be placed on the walls of every schoolroom in the country and that newspapers should publish them in their Sunday editions. Another rabbi preached that closer attention to the Ten Commandments would enhance the American democratic character. A few months later, yet another rabbi “described the Decalogue as the foundation of modern civilization.” At the beginning of the 1950s, a formerly nondescript hill in North Carolina was converted into “Ten Commandments Mountain,” which visitors could climb while reading the sacred words that were “written in concrete, with letters five feet high and four feet wide.”

In what ultimately became the most enduring effort to promote the Ten Commandments, the Fraternal Order of Eagles—a private humanitarian organization that was founded in Seattle by a group of theater owners—convinced the State of Minnesota in 1951 to support their effort to distribute paper copies of the Ten Commandments throughout the country, including to churches, school groups, courts, and government offices. The idea was introduced to the Eagles by a state court judge in Minnesota, E.J. Ruegemer. The judge decided to engage in this work after realizing how little a particular juvenile convict knew about the Ten Commandments. This inspired the judge to begin a crusade to promote the Ten Commandments throughout the land, as if they were a talisman that could help ward off criminal behavior. The printed version of the Eagles’ Ten Commandments provided an abbreviated and sanitized version of scripture that had been approved by Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish clergy. The printed version included decorative drawings of an eagle, an American flag, the Star of David, the Chi-Rho cross, and a pyramid with an all-seeing eye. According to the Eagles, thousands of framed versions were distributed throughout the country during the next few years. In August 1952, the Eagles presented one such print to President Truman in the White House.

After the Ten Commandments crusade was well under way and two weeks before the Eagles delivered their framed copy to President Truman in the midst of the 1952 presidential elections, the famous Hollywood director Cecil B. DeMille “officially confirmed a long-standing rumor that his next film undertaking will be ‘The Ten Commandments’” and that it would be produced in Technicolor. Press releases issued during the next two years announced which major actors had signed on to appear in which leading roles. In 1955, while filming on location at Mt. Sinai, DeMille was suddenly inspired to finance and distribute brass versions of Ten Commandment monuments throughout the country. DeMille no doubt had some worthy but also mixed motives. DeMille telephoned Judge Ruegemer in Minnesota, who had spearheaded the Eagles’ project, only to be rebuffed with a counterproposal to carve the commandments on stone tablets, just as God himself had done on Mt. Sinai. DeMille readily accepted the suggestion and began to make arrangements with the Eagles to help pay for the stone monuments. The campaign to erect monuments would help him advertise the pending release of his blockbuster film, and he also believed that the public could learn from the
message of the Ten Commandments (both on celluloid and on stone). Paramount Pictures authorized cities that wanted to erect monuments to have an “Eagles Night” screening of the film, where the proceeds would help defray the cost of purchasing the stone tablets for the towns. The world had come full circle. The Eagles organization, founded by theater owners, was now working with a Hollywood legend to promote the Ten Commandments—both the film and God’s law.

With DeMille’s encouragement, and against the backdrop of the pending release of the film, Ten Commandments monuments began to be erected in 1955 in Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Wisconsin (the last of which was attended by Yul Brynner, who played Pharaoh in the movie). Martha Scott (Moses’s mother) helped dedicate the monument in Pittsburgh. Charlton Heston (Moses himself) participated in the dedication ceremony at the International Peace Garden in 1956. The monuments began to sprout up across the country. Though the exact number of Eagles monuments is not known, it is probably in excess of 200—though some have asserted that as many as 2,000 were erected. DeMille was honored by the Eagles in 1956 for his efforts.

The first scene of the film version of the Ten Commandments does not show Moses in the bulrushes, or God’s finger carving the divine law, but Director DeMille himself, standing in front of a curtain, explaining why he had made the film.

This may seem an unusual procedure, speaking to you before the film begins, but we have an unusual subject, the story of the birth of freedom, the story of Moses... The theme of this picture is whether men ought to be ruled by God’s law, or whether they ought to be ruled by the whims of a dictator like Ramses. Are men the property of the state, or are they free souls under God? This same battle continues throughout the world today. Our intention was not to create a story, but to be worthy of the divinely inspired story created three thousand years ago, the five books of Moses.

The audience could not help but catch the unveiled reference to the Soviet Union, where dictators treated people as if they were the property of the state. The “same battle” for freedom that existed at the time of Pharaoh “continues throughout the world today.” The battle for freedom against tyranny is led by those who act in God’s name and under God’s law, just as President Eisenhower had explained in his American Legion broadcast during the first few days of his presidency. Although many members of the clergy subsequently denounced the film as being biblically incorrect and, as Hollywood is all-too-prone to do, emphasizing the heroes’ love lives rather than the divine message, nevertheless, it was a major box-office success, though it lost in the Oscar competition for best film to the film Around the World in Eighty Days. (Yul Brynner won the Best Actor award for the title role in The King and I rather than for the Pharaoh of Egypt.) Despite Director DeMille’s reliance on nonbiblical sources and his having taken liberties with the biblical message, the film has been an enduring draw in Christian entertainment circles. Even the racy love scenes that once raised alarms now seem perfectly tame.
Others also got into the Ten Commandments act. A New York City stenographer named Adelaide O’Mara spent $400 of her hard-earned money to place an advertisement for the Ten Commandments (God’s, not DeMille’s) in some New York subway cars. When a news story about her ran in the New York Times, President Eisenhower was so moved by the stenographer’s gesture that he wrote her a letter and invited her to participate in an “ask the President” television interview. The Eagles were so impressed by her that they named Miss O’Mara the recipient of their International Civic Award. School officials and local governments began posting and erecting Ten Commandment monuments, and controversies over their constitutionality and efficacy sprang up immediately thereafter.

Curiously, while religion, spirituality, and Christianity had been themes of the Eisenhower administration from its beginning, it seems that the first time that Eisenhower himself began to make references to the Ten Commandments in public did not begin until the movie version was released in 1956. The Ten Commandments gained traction. Billy Graham opened his sermon in his impressive 1957 crusade in Madison Square Garden by citing the Ten Commandments as a core message of the Bible. According to Graham, people have been taught during the past generation that morality is relative and not absolute; we’ve done away with the Ten Commandments; we’ve done away with the Sermon on the Mount, and now we’re reading the results in dishonesty, lying, cover-up and hypocrisy.

In retrospect, Graham’s fierce condemnation of the United States halfway through the Eisenhower administration and in the midst of the 1950s is remarkable. In the twenty-first century, many religious and political leaders look back to the 1950s with rose-tinted nostalgia and as a time before “the Supreme Court took God out of the public schools.” In the popular imagination, the 1950s was a time before drugs and pornography were widespread, before traditional gender roles were questioned, and before ethical relativism presented itself. By the late 1970s, the 1950s were imagined as a golden era filled with political piety and with monuments to the Ten Commandments. But here we have the most admired religious leader of his time chastising his audience in 1956 that America was at that time corrupt and that Americans had ceased obeying the Ten Commandments. If America was a golden age in the 1950s, the golden tongue of Billy Graham did not praise it. America’s favorite preacher preached revolution.

I believe we need a spiritual revolution in America. We need a revolt against materialism; a revolt against crime; a revolt against the emphasis on sex; a revolt against the sins and the wickedness in high places. We need a spiritual revolution in America.

Our generation is filled with nervous tension, a revolt against all restraints and a terrible gnawing fear.

We must face it. We’ve lost God. We’ve lost our contact with the Almighty.
Was Religion Really “The First Line of Defense” against Communism?

The decade of the 1950s was filled with pronouncements by preachers and politicians that religion, Christianity, the Bible, prayer, and faith were America’s first line of defense against atheistic communism. President Eisenhower offered a prayer at his inauguration and asserted that religion was the foundation of our democracy. For those who believed in the adoption of laws favoring God and the holding of ceremonies where he was praised, the 1950s should have been a time when it would have been “a bliss to be alive... very heaven.” Were these gestures “deeply felt,” as Eisenhower might have said, or was something else going on?

In January of 1952, five years before his Madison Square Garden sermon, quoted above, and shortly before he traveled to Europe to meet with aspiring presidential candidate Eisenhower, Billy Graham led a five-week revival at the National Guard Armory in Washington, D.C. His nightly sermons railed against the terrible moral condition in which the country then found itself and he pled for a spiritual awakening. While dismayed at the abject state of contemporary morality (even cadets at West Point cheated on exams!), he was encouraged by what he felt to be a genuine spiritual hunger of the American people for the Bible and God. At one point during this Washington crusade, Graham ventured over to the Capitol building and delivered a sermon on the steps where presidents-elect stood to take the oath of office. The 33-year-old Graham, still two years shy of satisfying the constitutionally-imposed minimum-age requirement for president, said: “If I would run for President of the United States today, on a platform of calling the people back to God, back to Christ, back to the Bible, I’d be elected. There is a hunger for God today.”

Although Graham was deeply alarmed at the lack of spiritual values pervading America, he already was impressed in early 1952 by the deep spiritual qualities of General Eisenhower. He also had been moved by the rich spiritual qualities of Vice President Richard Nixon, whom he had met a year earlier and whose “warm smile and firm handshake impressed” him. Graham found Nixon to be a “modest and moral man with spiritual sensitivity.” In the beginning of the 1950s, Graham had great hopes for an America led by General Eisenhower and Vice President Nixon. Early in the Eisenhower administration Graham praised the president’s “spiritual leadership” and was pleased to note that Eisenhower “agreed with him that the United States was ‘experiencing the greatest religious renaissance in our history.’” But just how accurate were his prophecies about the efficacy of prayer and spiritual renewal that he had imagined would follow as a result of the administration led by his friends Eisenhower and Nixon who had such obvious spiritual qualities? At the same time that he was praising the power of prayer, he was making dire prophecies about what would happen if his warning were not heeded. New York City was given notice that “if it remained unrepentant, this city would have to grapple with forces...
preparing a hydrogen bomb.”  

In 1960, as the eight years of Eisenhower-Nixon stewardship was coming to an end, Billy Graham was asked to write an essay on “The National Purpose.” His observations about the spiritual condition of the country at the beginning of the 1960s were, for all practical purposes, identical to those that he had made 10 years earlier. Graham began his 1960 article by saying that

regardless of the outward appearance of prosperity within the corporate life of America today there is present a form of moral and spiritual cancer which can ultimately lead to our destruction unless the disease is treated and the trend is reversed.

I am convinced that unless we heed the warning, unless we bring Americans back to an awareness of God’s moral laws, unless a moral fiber is put back into the structure of our nation, we are headed for national disaster.

The political leaders and religious leaders and the country as a whole had been the beneficiaries of 10 years of official prayers, proclamations, and paens to God. The country had overwhelmingly received all of the official governmental support for religion that had been requested, but something was still lacking and the country remained, in Graham’s eyes, on the path to disaster. Eisenhower, who had spoken repeatedly about the importance of “deeply-held” religious beliefs and public religion as a foundation for democracy while serving in office, somehow neglected to mention it in the 1,200 pages of his post-presidential memoirs. As with his study of World War II, he was more interested in political and economic matters than the divine.

Perhaps an important clue about the seriousness of the God-speak in legislative activities inadvertently slipped through in the legislative history of the bill to put “In God We Trust” on paper money. Congressman Bennett, as quoted above, had insisted publicly that putting God’s name on American currency was an important expression of the American people’s faith in the divine and the special protection that God had shown for the United States of America. And no doubt many firmly believed this. But a different viewpoint on this governmental theism was offered during the brief and unpublicized hearing when the cameras were not rolling. When the “In God We Trust” bill went before the Executive Session of the Senate Committee on Banking and Currency, and when the public was not watching, the hearing lasted barely a few seconds and was described in the following language by Committee Chairman Fulbright: “It is a minor bill. I’d like to get rid of it before we get to the Defense Production Act.” Having approved of the “minor” bill that put “God” on American currency, the senators quickly shifted to discuss the really important topic of the day: funding the American military.
A Military Second to None

After twenty-seven months overseas, experience with all types of soldiers, both service and frontline troops, I am forced to conclude that the net spiritual result of the war will be negative rather than positive. It is my observation that the number of those whose religious life has been stimulated by their war experiences is more than offset by those whose religious and moral living has lapsed or become vitiated by the low moral tone and religious indifference of military life.

—Chaplain Paul W. Burres
June 28, 1945

Our chief responsibility as moral beings is toward God.

—Departments of the Army and the Air Force
Character Guidance Discussion Topics, 1952

As far as our best minds can see, the only promising defenses against atomic warfare are moral and political, not physical defenses. This momentous fact is fundamental in our present situation.

—Federal Council of Churches
Special Commission Report, March 1946

As long as the existing situation holds, for the United States to abandon its atomic weapons, or to give the impression that they would not be used, would leave the non-communist world with totally inadequate defense. For Christians to advocate such a policy would be for them to share responsibility for the world-wide tyranny that might result.

—Federal Council of Churches
Special Commission Report, December 1950

It would be wrong to argue that we have been a peaceful people. We have not been a peaceful people.... After the Cold War—again, with remarkably little debate,
with remarkably little discussion of [what are] the implications of the course upon which we are embarking—what we did was to commit ourselves to perpetual military supremacy.

—Col. Andrew J. Bacevich
May 9, 2005

The Best and the Bravest

American public opinion polls repeatedly find that the U.S. military is the most-admired institution in the country and that the public’s confidence in the military is higher than in that of any other institution, including organized religion. To whatever extent there may be differences between the two major political parties on budgeting priorities for the military, no major political leader of either party questions in any fundamental way whether the United States should have military capabilities “second to none” or whether the United States should have an international network of allies, military bases, and fleets or whether the country should have the ability to “project power” throughout the world. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, even before the attacks of September 11, the United States spent almost as much on its military as the rest of the world combined. No major candidate for president in the last 20 years has questioned whether the United States should spend such large sums on defense. With the notable exception of President Eisenhower’s speech warning of the dangers of the “military-industrial complex,” delivered strategically at the end of his presidency in 1961, no president has made a major public priority of warning the American people about the dangers of over-reliance on the military in foreign affairs or the influence that military expenditures has on shaping the domestic agenda. Criticism is typically limited to uncovering examples of military waste, with the classic example being the purchase of “six hundred dollar toilet seats.” For most Americans and their political leaders, the concern is at best the gilt complex and never the military-industrial complex.

Dr. Andrew J. Bacevich is a West Point graduate, a Vietnam veteran, a conservative Catholic, and a colonel in the U.S. Army (retired). In The New American Militarism (2005), Bacevich warned against the bipartisan foreign military policy that he believes overly relies on the military and that has caused serious damage to the United States both at home and abroad.

Today as never before in their history Americans are enthralled with military power. The global military supremacy that the United States presently enjoys—and is bent on perpetuating—has become central to our national identity. The nation’s arsenal of high-tech weaponry and the soldiers who employ that arsenal have come to signify who we are and what we stand for.

Bacevich asserts that even after the end of the Cold War, political leaders, “liberals and conservatives alike, became enamored with military might.” A “striking aspect of America’s drift toward militarism has been the absence of dissent offered by any political figure of genuine stature.” In modern times, Americans
have fallen prey to militarism, manifesting itself in a romanticized view of soldiers, a tendency to see military power as the truest measure of national greatness, and outsized expectations regarding the efficacy of force. To a degree without precedent in U.S. history, Americans have come to define the nation’s strength and well-being in terms of military preparedness, military action, and the fostering of (or nostalgia for) military ideals. 9

This overwhelming American consensus favoring what Bacevich calls “militarism” was not always present in America.

Between World Wars: Demobilization, Disarmament, and Pacifism

A few minutes before midnight on June 2, 1919, two anarchists placed a suitcase bomb on the steps in front of the home of U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, at 2132 R Street in Washington, D.C. The bomb exploded prematurely, killing the two men before they could escape. The force of the blast demolished the ground floor of the attorney general’s house and blew out the windows of Palmer’s facing neighbor, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt. The future president, who was at home at the time of the blast, went outside and saw severed limbs and body parts strewn in the street. According to a New York Times reporter, “Mr. Roosevelt said that from the kind of socks worn by the men they appeared to be poorly dressed.” 10

During the weeks between the end of World War I on November 11, 1918 and the night he surveyed the wreckage of the blast across the street from his home, 36-year-old Assistant Navy Secretary Roosevelt oversaw the largest and most rapid naval dismantling in American military history. The U.S. Navy had at first resisted the push to demobilize the fleet. On the day that the armistice was signed in Europe, Roosevelt’s boss, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, announced that “no immediate steps would be taken toward demobilizing any part of the naval forces of the United States.” 11 While that may indeed have been Secretary Daniels’s intention on November 11, it became inoperative almost immediately thereafter and young Roosevelt was soon assigned the responsibility for closing naval bases in Europe at the same time that President Woodrow Wilson was negotiating the terms of the peace treaty in Paris.

On February 24, 1919, President Wilson, taking advantage of a break in the negotiations in Paris, arrived in Boston Harbor aboard the U.S.S. George Washington. The president wanted to use the suspension in talks to shore up domestic support for what would become the League of Nations and the Treaty of Versailles. Accompanying the president who had led the United States into World War I was Assistant Navy Secretary Roosevelt, who would later lead the United States into World War II and would help create what became the United Nations. In 1919, neither the past nor the future war president advocated that the United States possess a military force “second to none.” Neither suggested that having a strong military was a way to guarantee American security. The president was
proud of his role in the ongoing peace negotiations in Paris and the assistant secretary was proud of his having completed the dismantling of U.S. naval bases in Europe. Roosevelt announced to the press corps that assembled at Boston Harbor to greet their arrival:

Few realize that the American navy had fifty-four bases in European waters and the Azores, including destroyer stations and mine-laying bases. . . . We leased docks and buildings [and] constructed hundreds of hangars, piers, hospitals, storehouses, and other buildings. Almost 50,000 officers and men now have been sent home and all the flying stations and bases, with a few exceptions, have been evacuated. All material of future value has been sent home.12

Only three months after the armistice had been signed, and before the Treaty of Versailles had been finalized, the U.S. Navy had moved from its initial position of opposing any demobilization to having effectively closed all of its naval bases in Europe.

While American naval bases had largely been closed, its ships continued to sail—but principally for the purpose of returning the hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers in Europe back to American shores. At the war’s end, there had been more than two million combat and support staff serving under General Pershing on the continent.13 Fourteen battleships and 10 cruisers were refitted following the war to become troop carriers to bring the boys back home.14 On the day that the armistice was signed, and that the navy announced that it had no plans to demobilize, the army reported that it would cautiously implement a program that “entails gradual breaking up of large military units.”15 Scarcely a week later, in response to public pressure, the army retreated and announced that 200,000 soldiers would be released within two weeks and that the discharge rate would rise to an astonishing (and improbable) 30,000 per day afterwards.16 A month later the army announced that its month-old goal had been achieved, if not surpassed, and another 900,000 were slated for early demobilization.17 A week later the number was upped to 987,000.18 While many of this number slated for demobilization were serving in the continental United States, the withdrawal from Europe also proceeded rapidly—perhaps too rapidly—for the military’s and the country’s own good.

At the time of the armistice, General Pershing proposed that 30 American divisions (approximately 1,400,000 total personnel) should remain as occupying forces in Europe. Pershing’s proposal initially stirred little comment, but it subsequently became a public relations problem for the War Department. Two months later, in January 1919, Army Chief of Staff Peyton C. March was forced to deny that there were any plans to keep a force of that size in Europe, and that the United States would keep only as many as would be “consistent with our international obligations” and that it “was not the purpose of this government to maintain in France anything like 30 divisions of troops.”19 That same month, prominent Democratic Senator James A. Reed of Missouri, who opposed the League of Nations, advocated “immediate demobilization” of American forces in Europe in order to reduce the burdensome taxes that Americans were required to pay for their
By April, Chief of Staff March reported that the army had demobilized more troops in a shorter period of time than in any of its prior wars. In three months, the army had demobilized almost half of the peak wartime military personnel (from approximately four million to barely under two million). By July 1919, Roosevelt’s navy had almost completed its demobilization (316,554 sailors had been released), with a significant percentage of those still in service being deployed to transporting the remnants of the army back from France. By August the soldiers remaining in France were not the 1,400,000 recommended by General Pershing, but a mere 36,000. By the first anniversary of the armistice, the United States had released 3,560,000 military personnel, 96 percent of the total planned demobilization. America had returned to its traditional position of opposing large standing armies and navies. The war was over and American military power was on the way to being mothballed.

President Wilson’s brief return to the United States in February 1919 was designed to promote the treaty establishing the League of Nations. It was already clear that the president was going to have a difficult time obtaining the Senate’s advice and consent to the treaty that was being negotiated in the French capital. Though Wilson had been lionized in Europe, he would face serious opposition in the United States Senate. His February effort to gain support in the Senate consisted of one clumsy misstep after another. Massachusetts was the home state of the powerful and moderate Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, who would be an important figure in obtaining the votes of two-thirds of the senators. Rather than attempting to seduce the Massachusetts senator, Wilson seems to have gone out of his way to provoke Lodge in his home town. Wilson gave a partisan speech in Boston and gave his listeners a copy of the draft League of Nations covenant before bothering to give it to the senators who would decide its fate. Wilson insulted many who dared to oppose his handiwork. He blundered again by warning the Senate not to discuss the draft treaty before he returned to Washington. Upon arriving in the capital, Wilson held a dinner at the White House where some felt that he had “ hectored” them as if “they were being reproved for neglect of their lessons by a very frigid teacher in a Sunday School class.”

After his short visit to the United States, President Wilson returned to Paris for three additional months of negotiations. At the end of June 1919, the same month that the bomb blew out the glass of Roosevelt’s home on R Street, the delegates to the Paris Peace Conference met in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. On June 28, the Treaty of Versailles was signed that included harsh terms for Germany and a League of Nations for the world. After signing, President Wilson left Paris that same day and returned to the United States to ensure that the Senate would consent to the treaty.

But before the ink had dried on the signature page of the Treaty of Versailles, Senator William (“The Lion of Idaho”) Borah rose on the floor of the U.S. Senate in Washington to denounce it. The principal line of attack first raised by the senator was not what we might have expected. It was not that the Treaty of Versailles was too harsh (or too lenient) with regard to Germany, or that
President Wilson had failed adequately to consult with the Senate, or that the
League of Nations was too strong (or too weak). Senator Borah, a Republican,
denounced the treaty instead because it was designed to benefit “big business,”
“financial interests,” “Wall Street financiers,” and “powerful banking interests”
and said that these moneyed interests were the people who were promoting its
ratification. While the “money interest” theme waned in relative importance
during the following months, it was never dropped entirely. Among those who
ultimately refused to accept the League of Nations were several in the populist-
progressive wing of the Republican Party who had previously been supporters
of President Theodore Roosevelt and who often spoke out in favor of the “work-
ing man” and others less privileged. In this group of “anti-big business Republi-
cans” were not only Senator Borah, but progressive Republican Senators Robert
LaFollette Sr. (Wisconsin), Hiram Johnson (California), Joseph M. McCormick
(Illinois), Miles Poindexter (Washington), Asle J. Gronna (North Dakota), and
George W. Norris (Nebraska)—all of whom voted against the treaty.

The Senate conducted its debates and voted on the treaty on November 19,
1919. Before the final vote, Senator Borah delivered possibly the most famous
speech of his career. Referring to the farewell address by the first president of the
United States, George Washington, Senator Borah, invoked quasi-religious
language to denounce the treaty.

In opposing the treaty I do nothing more than decline to renounce and tear out of my
life the sacred traditions which throughout fifty years have been translated into my
whole intellectual and moral being. I will not, I cannot, give up my belief that
America must not atone for the happiness of her own people, but for the moral guid-
ance and greater contentment of the world, be permitted to live her own life. Next to
the tie which binds man to his God is the tie which binds man to his country, and all
schemes, all plans, however ambitious and fascinating they seem in their proposal,
but which would embarrass or entangle and impede or shackle her sovereign will,
which would compromise her freedom of action I unhesitatingly put behind me.

It is not only the language of religion—“sacred traditions,” “moral being,”
“atonement,” “moral guidance,” and “God”—that Senator Borah employs. He
adds to it the provocative image of his country being a woman to whom he is
“bound” and “tied” but whom he would jealously protect from any “fascinating”
foreign plan to “shackle” or “compromise” her.

Shortly before midnight, on November 19, 1919, the Republican-controlled
Senate voted, largely along party lines, not to give its consent to the Versailles
Treaty promoted by the Democratic president. Opponents of the treaty can be
grouped into different ideological categories, and their reservations and reasons
differed in scope and rigidity (including a strong dose of personal animus against
Wilson himself); the ostensible and public reasons against it focused on opposition
to an alliance that would entangle the United States in world affairs and that would
limit American freedom of action. It would not be for another 25 years, in 1945,
when the United States ratified a comparable treaty creating the United Nations.
Four years thereafter, in 1949, the Senate gave its consent to the North Atlantic
Treaty Organization (NATO), an “entangling alliance” of exactly the type cautioned against by President Washington and Senator Borah. But for the duration of the 1920s and 1930s, the United States would continue its traditional practice of avoiding such alliances while maintaining a relatively small military force. While certainly not all opponents of the treaty were “isolationists,” isolationism became a prevailing interpretation of what transpired. The United States would be sufficient unto itself until 1941 and would go its own way.

Although Woodrow Wilson’s name was not on the ballot for president in 1920, Republican nominee Warren G. Harding waged his campaign as if the now-unpopular Wilson were his actual opponent. Harding and Calvin Coolidge won the election contest in a landslide victory against Governor James Cox and his vice presidential running mate, Franklin D. Roosevelt. Americans were increasingly willing to forget Red Scares and Leagues of Nations. They had better things to do with their money than spend it on armies and navies. Those “money interests” whom Senator Borah attacked already understood that one of the best uses of money was to make more money. The Red Scare gave way to the Roaring Twenties.

Though Harding won a decisive victory, he had a somewhat fractured Republican Congress to contend with, including many of its leaders who had been his opponents for the party’s nomination. In a move designed not only to promote American foreign policy interests but to unify his political party as well, the Republican president of the United States convened the Washington Naval Conference in 1921, the world’s first international diplomatic meeting to promote disarmament. Meeting in Constitution Hall only a few blocks from the White House (and just down Pennsylvania Avenue under the watchful eye of the Senate), the conference participants negotiated a series of treaties calling for multilateral disarmament of naval powers in the Pacific, including most notably the United States and imperial Japan. The Republican senators who had opposed the League of Nations treaty, along with the Democrats who had supported it, approved the Washington Conference disarmament treaties. Peace and disarmament were to be the official order of the day in the Pacific.

The 1921 disarmament treaties concluded by Japanese and American diplomats were negotiated only two blocks away from where the U.S. State Department was then located. Twenty years later, on the morning of December 7, 1941, in those same State Department offices, U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull met with other Japanese diplomats who brought with them a document assuring the United States that it was “the immutable policy of the Japanese Government...to promote world peace.” Secretary Hull, who had already read an intercepted copy of the Japanese document and who also was aware of the ongoing attack on Pearl Harbor, dismissed the peace-affirming diplomats with the famous statement that “In all my fifty years of public service I have never seen a document that was more crowded with infamous falsehoods and distortions on a scale so huge that I never imagined until today that any Government on this planet was capable of uttering them.”

But in 1921, no one anticipated the surprise attack at dawn. The American public wanted peace and did not want a standing army of any significant size.
The United States did not engage in any major military buildup in response to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 nor the rise of Hitler in 1932. In fact, the years after 1935 can be described as the quintessential “isolationist” period in American foreign policy in the twentieth century.33 “By the beginning of the 1930s, the United States was retreating from military intervention in Latin America and Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson reacted to the Japanese conquest of Manchuria [by] threaten[ing] nothing more serious than nonrecognition.”34

As the fear of anarchism subsided in the 1920s and as Americans became relatively more isolationist in outlook, a peacetime peace movement emerged. Pacifism, which had largely been frozen following American intervention in the Great War, began to thaw.35 The most prominent Baptist minister during the first half of the twentieth century—and arguably “the nation’s most influential Protestant preacher”—the Reverend Harry Emerson Fosdick, famously took a pledge never to go into the military. He did not stand alone. Three “of the most prominent preachers (Fosdick, Ernest F. Tittle, and Ralph W. Sockman) were taking pacifist positions.”36 Many prominent religious leaders in the United States, even in the face of mounting violence from abroad in the 1930s, remained adamantly pacifist. According to Robert Miller, the response by religious communities to events in Europe was “pathetically confused, halting, divided, and uncertain. . . . To put it bluntly, confusion over war and peace seemed more starkly extreme in the Protestant churches than in American society as a whole—and this is a damning comparison.”37

Not all of the pacifism in the United States was premised on a principled, moral opposition to war. In some cases, it was based upon an open admiration of Adolf Hitler and the wish to keep the United States from interfering with the continent-transforming events in Europe. The America First Committee, founded in 1940, was a prominent organization that quickly grew to include 450 chapters nationwide and provided a speakers bureau to oppose intervention in the European war. It continued in force until Pearl Harbor effectively put it out of business.38 The founders of the America First Committee included not only the right-wing Charles Lindbergh but the famed Norman Thomas, the Socialist Party’s presidential candidate. Senator Robert LaFollette, the leader of the Progressive Party and opponent of the League of Nations, also participated. American proto-fascists did not want the United States to take action against Hitler, while those on the left wanted to avoid becoming entangled in another European war.39 While their reasons might differ sharply, a major issue on which Americans largely agreed at least until 1940 was that the United States should keep its military out of foreign conflicts. As the perceived danger of Hitler continued to increase, the majority of Americans of all political stripes became increasingly isolationist. While pacifism (which theoretically was opposed to wars) and American isolationism (which opposed sending military forces abroad to intervene in foreign wars) were not necessarily prompted by the same philosophical, moral, or political concerns, they both were opposed to the United States building a powerful military force in the 1930s.
The Greatest Generation: The U.S. Military in 1945–1946

The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 awakened Americans from their pacifistic and isolationistic slumbers. The United States promptly declared war on Japan and Germany and immediately transformed itself into a wartime industrial economy. Less than four years after the already weak navy was attacked at Pearl Harbor, Americans and their allies defeated the world’s two reigning military superpowers, Germany and Japan.

On August 10, 1945, the day after the atomic bomb code-named “Fat Man” obliterated Nagasaki, Japanese Emperor Hirohito announced that his country would surrender to the United States. As soon as the capitulation was announced, Americans—just as they had following World War I and every prior war—immediately began asking how quickly the military would be demobilized to prewar levels. The same day that Hirohito made his announcement, a reporter from the New York Times wandered over to the Pentagon in search of answer to that question but was rebuffed with the response that it was much too premature to speculate. The surrender, he was told, was only hours old, and that any demobilization “would still be gradual for one thing, so as not to disrupt the civilian economy.” Based upon what he learned at the Pentagon, the reporter wrote that “no swift mass release from the Army or Navy can be expected with the Japanese surrender and, officers stated, there will be no immediate stop in the redeployment of forces to the Pacific.”

Whatever Pentagon officers or New York Times readers believed they knew within the first 24 hours after the surrender, it was all rendered “inoperative” by the following day. There was an immediate and overwhelming public clamor for demobilization just as had been the case following World War I. The day after the surrender, the cautious statements from the day before were already out of date. On August 11, unnamed military experts were already speculating that of the more than 12,000,000 Americans on active duty, the army could release 5,000,000 soldiers (of its 8,000,000 total) within one year.41 Less than one week later, those initial off-the-record speculations became official U.S. policy. The army announced that it would attempt to lessen its force by 5,000,000, within 12 months, while cautioning the anxious public that it might take somewhat longer. (In fact, the actual number that ultimately was released from the army during the one-year period turned out to be the much higher figure of 6.5 million.) The navy announced that it intended to release between 1.5 and 2.5 million sailors within the next 12–18 months. Within less than a year it had released the full 2.5 million.

These announcements of dramatic cutbacks did not satisfy the American people, who were tired of the war that was for them barely three and a half years old. Five days after Japan announced its surrender, President Harry Truman already was under criticism from members of Congress who thought that the demobilization plans were not proceeding rapidly enough. To underscore their dissatisfaction with the slow pace, Republican members of Congress began to threaten to
terminate the Selective Service program if the president did not act more quickly. In Congressional hearings shortly after the September 2 formal surrender aboard the U.S.S. Missouri, the War Department was applauded for the way it had conducted the war but criticized for its slow pace on demobilization and for the confusion surrounding the unclear standards determining who would be released and when. Scarcely two weeks after the formal surrender, an article entitled “Public Confusion and Discontentment Is Found Over Slow Demobilization,” was published by the New York Times. “Despite the release of veterans in large numbers the demobilization program has become a topic of clamorous debate that threatens to discredit much of the good work accomplished by the staffs of the armed forces in winning the war.” The war had been over for only two weeks, and Americans were already impatient. They wanted to bring the boys home and get out of Europe and Asia. In 1945, few could possibly have imagined that the grandchildren of those based in Europe and Asia in 1945 would be stationed at the same American military bases abroad well into the twenty-first century.

Japan’s capitulation occurred during Congress’s August recess. While senators and representatives might have expected the public response in their districts to be wild and joyful celebrations of the stunning victory in what would soon be called the “good war,” they were struck instead by angry complaints from their constituents that demobilization was not proceeding rapidly enough. As soon as Congress reconvened in September, it summoned General of the Army George C. Marshall to explain the military’s rationale for proceeding too slowly for the public’s satisfaction. General Marshall, one of the heroes of the war, was met by complaints by members of Congress who relayed to him the angry messages from their constituents who wanted the pace to be expedited. Observing the headlong direction in which Congress was moving, many in the military were reminded of the terrible consequences of the overly rapid American demobilization following World War I. “Mindful of the experience after the last war—when some pressure forced a precipitous dissolution of the armed forces—War Department and other Government circles have eyed with apprehension the recent trends in Congress.” But the public and not the military was calling the shots.

On January 4, 1946, barely five months after the end of the war, military officials became increasingly worried that the United States would not have enough troops to satisfy its ongoing occupation requirements in Europe and Asia. Fearing a breakdown of order in the occupied countries and populations that were desperate and dispossessed, Lieutenant General J. Lawton (“Fightin’ Joe”) Collins announced on behalf of the army that occupation armies were already dangerously under-strength and that the military would need to return to a slower, more deliberate schedule for release of soldiers, particularly due to the fact that Congress had not yet reauthorized the Selective Service program and that a new infusion of soldiers might not be arriving as had been assumed. The reaction to General Collins’s announcement by soldiers on active duty was immediate, public, vocal, and hostile.
Thousands of United States soldiers stationed in and near Manila jammed one of the city’s main plazas tonight in a two hour rally protesting the reported War Department slow-down in demobilization and demanding a Congressional investigation. It was estimated that the crowd ran as high as 20,000.47

*Time* magazine reported that the news of General Collins’s announcement “completed a breakdown in Army morale” in Manila and “started thousands of men protesting and demonstrating.” According to *Time*, the American soldiers who led this protest movement “struck out against ‘imperialism,’ ‘militarism,’ the big brass, War Secretary Patterson, Congress—even businessmen.”48 The next morning, 2,500 American soldiers marched on their own U.S. Army headquarters in the Philippines.


On January 9, Lieutenant General Charles P. Hall, the acting commander of the Eighth Army (Japan), described the protests as “the first indication that a general breakdown in morale and discipline is beginning to show up in the occupation troops.”50 On that same day, January 9, the army announced that it had already demobilized 5,000,000 soldiers—and was thus ahead of even the most optimistic schedule laid out a mere five months earlier. But Truman’s newly appointed army chief of staff, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, was sufficiently concerned about the mounting morale problems and demonstrations by American soldiers that he issued a cablegram from the Pentagon to all overseas commanders ordering them, “without delay,” to send home all soldiers who were not immediately and directly needed for the ongoing occupation programs.51 The Eisenhower cable, which effectively countermanded the announcement of General Collins, did not stop the protests. GIs in London staged a demonstration two days later by marching to the headquarters of Brigadier General Claude M. Thiele, the U.S. commander of the London area office.52 The soldiers shouted “We want to go home.” One group of protestors, having heard that Eleanor Roosevelt was in town, managed to get an audience with the former first lady and elicit from her a promise that she would communicate their message to high government authorities. Another demonstration in Frankfurt “fizzled out” when only 50 uniformed American soldiers showed up to protest against the orders of their commanding officers.53 The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Anne O’Hare McCormick editorialized about the week’s events in her famous column “Abroad”:

The spectacle of American occupation troops crying to go home must be as disturbing to other occupying powers as it is encouraging to the population of occupied
Neither the American soldiers, the American public, nor the U.S. Congress was in the mood to be “projecting American power abroad,” nor to be “securing America’s vital interests” in the world. In January of 1946, American soldiers were “crying” to go home.\(^55\) In an eerie harbinger of the future, however, other observers thought they saw something far more sinister in the demonstrations than homesick lads who were tired of military life. The counsel for the House Committee on Un-American Activities ominously said “We have evidence to show that Communist agitators actually went into the Army for the sole purpose of causing trouble.”\(^56\) He did not, however, provide any evidence.

* * * *

The soldiers who were desperately and spontaneously trying to get out of the service and to return to the States had no illusions about the merits of military life. Even putting to the side the worst of their experiences—the horrors of combat—military life had little to recommend it. It certainly was not imagined by anyone to be a training ground for the spiritual or moral lives of those who served in its ranks. Professor Anne C. Loveland, in her landmark study on Evangelicals and the U.S. military, begins her work with the following words:

Like other Americans in the immediate postwar period, [Evangelicals] regarded the military environment as a particularly corrupting influence. Even before World War II, profanity, drunkenness, and gambling were legendary in the armed services. During the war Americans on the home front worried about rumors of soaring rates of promiscuity and venereal disease among draftees.\(^57\)

While it is a cliché to say that “there are no atheists in foxholes,” it might be equally accurate to say that “there are not many saints either.” Gerald L. Sittser, who studied the role of churches during World War II, cites Chaplain Paul W. Burres’s observations as being particularly apt:

After twenty-seven months overseas, experience with all types of soldiers, both service and frontline troops, I am forced to conclude that the net spiritual result of the war will be negative rather than positive. It is my observation that the number of those whose religious life has been stimulated by their war experiences is more than offset by those whose religious and moral living has lapsed or become vitiated by the low moral tone and religious indifference of military life.\(^58\)

Press reports in 1946 and 1947 revealed that life in the postwar military occupation of Germany and Japan was not healthy either for American soldiers or for the citizens of the countries they occupied. Army Chaplain Renwick C. Kennedy, upon returning to the United States after 20 months serving in Europe, described for *Christian Century* readers the circumstances of American soldiers in Europe. His report was such a powerful indictment that it was immediately picked up by *Time* magazine and quoted at length. After noting that American
servicemen seemed not to be particularly clear in their own minds about why they had fought the Germans, and having lamented their general lack of interest in political or military matters, Chaplain Kennedy criticized the mindset of the typical American soldier:

His interests are more primitive. They are chiefly three: 1) to find a German woman and sleep with her; 2) to buy or steal a bottle of cognac and get stinking drunk; 3) to go home.59

Dismayed that the military representatives of his country had such little appreciation for Europeans, Chaplain Kennedy reported that the “conduct of the average soldier...was at the least noisy and boisterous. At the worst it was criminal. The average [soldier] was odious and disgusting.” He insisted that the behavior went far beyond mere boorishness. American soldiers and officers “considered any young woman fair prey, and did not hesitate to make a pass at her. He chased women openly all over Europe, not merely professionals but any woman... It was also a heavy drinking army....He drank not with discretion and good manners, but like a beast....”60

The easy availability of alcohol to soldiers, with its inevitable consequences, was not merely a postwar phenomenon. Professor Paul Fussell, who was drafted and sent to France in 1944 at the age of 19, later wrote a history about the effect of military life on soldiers:

In Europe the U.S. Army Medical corps discovered that the troops were so eager for drink that numbers of them consumed captured buzz-bomb fluid (i.e., methyl alcohol) and died. Most were ground combat troops, and the Official History reports that “During the period October 1944 to June 1945...there were more deaths in the European theater due to a single agent, alcohol poisoning, than to acute communicable disease.” The history draws the inevitable conclusion: “In future operations the problem of alcoholic beverages...needs serious consideration.”61

Confirming a consequence of the behavior that Chaplain Kennedy had observed firsthand in Europe, the army acknowledged one month later (as reported by the New York Times), that: “The venereal disease rate among United States troops in Europe reached 264 cases a thousand on June 16, the highest since the beginning of the war and probably the highest in American military history.”62 This ignominious record would soon be surpassed. By September, the rate of venereal disease cases had risen to 30.5 percent—almost one soldier out of three.63 In December, an investigative report that the Senate Democrats had tried to suppress was made public by the Republicans. The findings were scathing. Venereal disease rates in Europe were reported as reaching 30 percent for white soldiers and 70 percent for blacks.64 There was “widespread misconduct” in the European theater among American officers. Fraternization with German women had resulted in “undermining the effectiveness of military government” and many “high-ranking” officers were involved in black market operations. The report alleged that “among the worst offenders were generals and high-ranking
colonels.” It was a standard practice for officers to use military vehicles to transport supplies to their mistresses.  

Things were not much better in Japan. In the same month that the new record for contracting venereal disease was disclosed in Germany (June 1946), the commander of allied troops in Japan, Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger, issued a letter to be read to all American troops under his command telling them that they were “endangering the mission of the occupation.” Once again the issue was not limited to boorish behavior. He “listed crimes by American soldiers, which were increasingly reported from all parts of Japan, as ‘malicious beatings of Japanese by both individuals and groups,’ housebreaking, assaults on women, drunkenness and thievery.” Reporters familiar with the situation in Japan said that the criminal behavior of American soldiers was not widely known in the United States (Eichelberger’s letter did not become known for over a month) because of the strict censorship that prevented the stories from being more widely circulated. “Possibly a typical case is one outfit, one of the best-known fighting groups in the Pacific, which last month had more than 100 courts-martial of its new recruits for crimes against the Japanese.” Eichelberger could at least be pleased that the rate of venereal disease for troops under his command had recently dropped from 27 percent to only 13.4 percent of the soldiers—which nevertheless remained a very high figure indeed.  

Of course, at some point, the soldiers infected with venereal diseases overseas would return home. The medical consequences of the return of infected soldiers tracked the pattern following World War I, where cases of venereal diseases hit record highs in the United States between 14 and 16 months after the troops returned. Speaking in October of 1946, the surgeon general of the U.S. Navy noted that although venereal diseases in the United States had fallen to a record low in 1944 (while the soldiers remained overseas), the rate had doubled since their return and it was then approaching the record high of 1920, just as had been the case following the return of soldiers after World War I. Although the American press was reluctant to publicize the problems of alcoholism, gambling, sexually transmitted diseases, and crimes stimulated by military life abroad, the evidence was fully available for anyone who wanted to know. One group that was responsible for welcoming returning soldiers immediately recognized the potential consequences of the looming health crisis. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) sought to act on the increasingly clear evidence of a serious national epidemic. In their November 1946 convention in Chicago, the VFW adopted a resolution that condemned the general laxity of the military as well as “the entertainment provided service men, particularly in overseas theatres,” which it found to have “been questionable, salacious and in some instances flagrantly immoral.” The VFW resolution, far from defending military commanders in the field, asserted that there is a “complacent service attitude which encourages promiscuity and even condones prostitution.” With such bad influences on soldiers, “many of our young veterans have returned physical, mental, moral and social wrecks.” Divorce statistics underscored this complaint.
The divorce rate in the United States in 1945–1946 was double that of the prewar years.72

By June of 1947, the army seems to have had enough of promiscuity, venereal diseases, crime, corruption, and bad press. The War Department (soon to be renamed Defense Department) announced that a group of clergymen—they were all men—would visit Europe and issue reports on the conditions of soldiers.73 Interestingly, and a harbinger of the future, the army sent not only the usual suspects from the mainline Federal Council of Churches (FCC) but also included evangelical religious figures, including some affiliated with the newly formed National Association of Evangelicals (NAE, 1942) and the fundamentalist American Council of Christian Churches (1941). One young clergyman who participated, and whose name now stands out, was Harold John Ockenga, the increasingly prominent conservative religious leader who was the pastor of the Park Street Church in Boston. Several months later, when the clergymen released their reports, after acknowledging the high “character” of many in the armed forces, the clergy nevertheless “deplored the quantities of liquor consumed, and the related incidence of venereal disease.” One member of the delegation, coincidentally named “Beers,” protested that the amount of alcohol consumed was “appalling.” Dr. George Beers already was looking beyond the army’s immediate practical concerns and had focused on the underlying moral failings that were the real cause of the physical ailments. If the soldiers “are encouraged to believe that moral laxity is permissible as long as disease does not result,” Beers argued, “we are laying the foundation of a nation of very much lower character and significance than America has been until now.”74

In Beers’s comment we see yet another foreshadowing of a transformation of American attitudes about the role that the U.S. military should play in American life. While Beers surely was incorrect in believing that the sordid condition of the U.S. military in the mid-1940s was anomalous in history (it was sadly all-too-typical of military life generally), he brought to his observation the fervent belief that something unusual had happened and that there was a real and urgent need to restore the military’s role of not just training soldiers to fight against their country’s armed enemies, but also forming strong character traits to aid them in their upcoming spiritual battles against moral enemies as well. The consequences of this new way of thinking would be significant over the next 20 years, both within the military itself and as regards public perceptions of the military. In believing that the (then) current generation had sunk to a new low, Beers and others took upon themselves the task of baptizing and purifying the U.S. military. They would be so successful in their mission to transform the U.S. military that it would have the retroactive effect of purging from public memory what Beers identified as the “moral laxity” of the 1940s. Beers and the other critics of the moral turpitude that was then rampant in the U.S. military might have been astonished to learn that this young generation that had sunk to a new low in their estimation would later be remembered as “the greatest generation.”
Another clergyman involved with the report took the next dramatic step, which went beyond defending the bodies and souls of American soldiers. Dr. W.O.H. Garman of the fundamentalist American Council of Christian Churches believed that the United States could fulfill a mission beyond guaranteeing military security by helping to save the souls of Europeans. Dr. Garman emphasized “the need for rehabilitating Europe spiritually, as well as economically [and] urged that [European] seminary students be brought to the United States for study. He said this would constitute the ‘finest kind of missionary work.’” What had initially been prompted by the military’s wish to improve discipline and reduce diseases within its own ranks had been transfigured, at lease in Garman’s vision, into an opportunity to shower Europeans with the blessings of American religion.

As of 1947, the majority of Americans—who were justifiably proud of the victory that their military had achieved in World War II—were increasingly being advised that military life had wreaked havoc on the spiritual and moral lives of those who were in its service. In response to the criticisms that had been building since 1945, the U.S. military launched its first trial “moral education” program in, notably, 1947 at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

The Truman administration and military leaders began implementing an unprecedented religious and moral welfare program in the armed forces. It mandated compulsory moral (or character) education for all military personnel, provided increased opportunities for religious activities, and greatly enhanced the role chaplains played in military training.

And that was only the beginning. Secretary of War Robert Patterson, who had first sent the clergy mission to Europe in 1946, instituted in 1947 the new program called “Character Guidance” for the army. His successor, George C. Marshall, bearing the new title of secretary of defense, ordered in 1951 that moral training be instituted throughout all of the armed forces because it is “in the national interest that personnel serving in the armed forces be protected in the realization and development of moral, spiritual, and religious values consistent with the religious beliefs of the individual concerned.” For General Marshall, the U.S. military would be teaching its soldiers not only the art of war but religion as well. In the 1950 manual entitled The Army Character Guidance Program, the U.S. military presumed itself to be competent not only to interpret religious doctrine but to convey it to its soldiers as well. In what might well have come from the influence of Catholic chaplains, inductees were advised that “Natural Law” and the “Moral Law” both came from God.

While apparently all of the clergy who participated in the army’s fact-finding mission to Europe in 1946–1947 found a deplorable state of affairs, some on the more conservative side had a vision that the U.S. military might become a fertile field for proselytizing. Prior to 1947, the military chaplains’ corps had been dominated by Protestants typically associated with the mainline Federal Council of Churches (after 1950, the National Council of Churches) and the
Catholic Church. Although Evangelicals and conservative churches had been quite vocal in the country, their political, governmental, and mass-cultural influence had been quite limited. At the same time that Evangelical Christians began to identify the U.S. military as a prime field for their missionary work, the number of Evangelical chaplains in the military began to rise. Evangelical clergy had typically been pacifist before World War II, and they largely had avoided sending their ranks into the chaplains’ corps. There were almost no Evangelical chaplains in the military when the National Association of Evangelicals was founded in 1942. But by 1955, there were at least 154.79

The NAE and other conservative religious groups not only placed chaplains in the military, they built new mission posts and “retreats” near military bases at home and abroad in order to evangelize soldiers and provide them with spiritual counseling while they were away from the healthy influence of hearth and home. One of the most famous “retreat towns” in Europe was in the charming resort village of Berchtesgaden in southern Bavaria. Even the Seventh-day Adventists, who long had been associated with pacifism, set up a new organization to provide counseling and outreach to soldiers. Christian officers also began to organize themselves to evangelize others in the military, beginning with the formation of the Officers’ Christian Union (OCU). Starting in 1946, the OCU focused its efforts on evangelizing midshipmen at Annapolis and cadets at West Point. By the end of the 1950s it had over 2,000 members.80

Some found that these new efforts to bring religion into the U.S. military paid immediate benefits. Anne Loveland quotes an observer, writing in 1949, that there had been a “significant change” and a “new emphasis on the spiritual health of the American soldier” and now “faith is an integral part of being a good soldier.” During the 1950s, church attendance of soldiers would continue to rise as it would for the American public as a whole. In dramatic contrast to the moral sewer described in 1946, the army chief of chaplains described the situation 10 years later as one where the typical soldier was seen as a “high-type” person who “represents the spiritual heritage of America.”81 During his crusade in Washington, D.C. in 1952, Billy Graham held lunchtime prayer sessions at the Pentagon. According to Graham, “Never in my whole religious experience...have I seen such a hunger for religion as at the Pentagon.”82 When Commander-in-Chief Truman declined to meet with the preacher during the Washington Crusade, Graham met instead with Truman’s nemesis, retired General Douglas MacArthur. According to Graham, the general who had challenged civilian control of the military was “one of the most inspiring men I ever met....He is deeply religious.”83 A few days later Graham met with then-active General Dwight D. Eisenhower at SHAPE in France. According to press reports at the time, Graham was “relieved” to discover that the general “approved” of religion: “We must have it,” Eisenhower told Graham.84

The number of soldiers in uniform declined from 1945 until 1948. But at exactly the point where the military began to be seen as promoting the moral and spiritual development of soldiers, and as Americans were identifying a new
atheist enemy on the horizon, the trend reversed and the number of soldiers in the military began to rise. Beginning in the late 1940s, and extending into the 1950s, the military would be perceived less and less as a necessary evil that had a corrupting influence on the soldiers under its control—and more as a character-building institution that could transform young men (and later young women) into clean-cut heroes who courageously defend our freedoms. Of course this transformation of popular attitudes about the military was not simply the result of new programs and good public relations by the military, but was thoroughly tied into the mounting public fear of the Soviet Union and the belief that the military was a crucial line of defense protecting Americans from the red menace.

**Dulles versus Dulles**

In the 1930s, the Federal Council of Churches was the largest and most politically influential interdenominational religious group in the United States. The preachers, theologians, and leaders affiliated with the FCC were among the best-known religious figures of the day. In the late 1930s, and during the first two years of the 1940s, a significant percentage of American religious leaders were self-described pacifists. In 1940, while Europe and the Far East were at war, the FCC, the mainstream voice of religion in America, established a new “Commission to Study the Bases of a Just and Durable Peace.” The Durable Peace Commission was charged with the responsibility of finding peaceful, rather than military, solutions to solving the world’s conflicts. The FCC sought to chair the commission someone who would command wide respect in both the worlds of religion and politics. It selected the person who was probably the most widely recognized foreign policy expert outside of government: John Foster Dulles.

Dulles’s Durable Peace Commission, which remained in existence from 1940 to 1946, issued its first report in early March 1942, only four months after the United States entered the war. The commission’s report emerged out of a meeting of prominent leaders in the field of religion, politics, and education. *Time* magazine noted that among

the 375 delegates who drafted the program were 15 bishops of five denominations, seven seminary heads (including Yale, Chicago, Princeton, Colgate-Rochester), eight college and university presidents (including Princeton’s Harold W. Dodds), practically all the ranking officials of the Federal Council and a group of well-known laymen, including John R. Mott, Irving Fisher and Harvey S. Firestone Jr. “Intellectually,” said Methodist Bishop Ivan Lee Holt of Texas, “this is the most distinguished American church gathering I have seen in 30 years of conference-going.”

Considering Dulles’s later reputation, the recommendations of his Durable Peace Commission issued in the midst of World War II are nothing short of astonishing. The wartime proposals read as if they had been prepared under the direction of the socialist pacifists of the 1930s rather than one of the archetypal cold warriors of the 1950s. Following the war, the peace commission recommended, a
“world government of delegated powers” should be established with new limitations on national sovereignty, and international control of all armies and navies. The report further concluded that there should be “a duly constituted world government of delegated powers: an international legislative body, an international court with adequate jurisdiction, international-administrative bodies with necessary powers, and adequate international police forces and provision for enforcing its worldwide economic authority.”

The United States, according to the 1942 Durable Peace Commission, should be sharply criticized for having put too much emphasis on “material gain” for itself and for not having contributed sufficiently to alleviating the world’s misery.

The natural wealth of the world is not evenly distributed. Accordingly the possession of such natural resources...is a trust to be discharged in the general interest. This calls for more than an offer to sell to all on equal terms. Such an offer may be a futile gesture unless those in need can, through the selling of their own goods and services, acquire the means of buying.86

The policies of unrestrained greed needed to end if true peace were to endure. A “new order of economic life is both imminent and imperative” and would certainly come either “through voluntary cooperation within the framework of democracy or through explosive political revolution.” The Dulles Report condemned intrinsic defects of the market-based economies because their unstable fluctuations breed the conditions for war and dictators. In order to overcome “mass unemployment, widespread dispossession from homes and farms, destitution, lack of opportunity for youth and of security for old age,” the Dulles Commission called on the church to “demand economic arrangements measured by human welfare.” The government needed to play an important role by taxing more justly with the goal being “that our wealth may be more equitably distributed.” People have not only political rights, but economic rights as well. “Every individual has the right to full-time educational opportunities...to economic security in retirement...to adequate health service [and an] obligation to work in some socially necessary service.”87

By the standards of the 1950s, Dulles’s consensus recommendations of religious leaders in a time of war 10 years earlier were internationalist, antimilitarist, socialist, collectivist, and anti-free market—or, in other words, “anti-American.”

At the same time the mandate of the Durable Peace Commission ended in 1946, John Foster Dulles wrote an article in Life magazine that was in the same spirit as his work for the FCC. In that article, Dulles called upon Americans to understand that Soviet leaders, including Joseph Stalin, were rational people and that Americans should not fall into the trap of believing that a military buildup would necessarily make the United States more secure. Dulles argued that even if the buildup were designed for purely defensive purposes, Soviet leaders would be reasonable in understanding that a strong American army and navy could also be used for offensive purposes, and that creating a powerful American military would only prompt the Soviets to reciprocate with their own
armed forces. The Dulles of 1946, who was at that time the most prominent Republican Party authority on foreign policy, called upon Americans to be prudent, to trust in Soviet rationality, and to lead by creating an inspirational example for the world rather than by seeking military hegemony. Dulles’s opinions in 1946 were not at all out of line with the contemporaneous viewpoints of the person who would later appoint him secretary of state. Visiting Europe in late 1946, General Eisenhower, who had recently been named army chief of staff by President Truman, similarly did not believe in rattling sabers. “We are progressing toward the point where men of my profession will be permanently out of a job.”

According to Eisenhower, “every intelligent man in the world knows that civilization cannot stand another war.”

Less than four years later, Dulles abandoned his 1946 opinions, albeit without acknowledging his reversal. In 1950, in an attempt to preserve his position as the leading Republican foreign policy expert, and fully aware of the rising antimunism in his party, he published *War or Peace*. In *War or Peace* the Soviet leaders are no longer rational men but have become the “fanatical Soviet Communist Party.” Stalin’s writings should now be seen as the equivalent of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. Dulles identified the core of their fanaticism and of their evil not in their imperialistic power drives or what he had identified it to be in 1946, their quest for security, but in their *atheism*.

Soviet Communism starts with an atheistic, Godless premise. Everything else flows from that premise. If there is no God, there is no moral or natural land and the “material world is primary.”

Dulles no longer saw rational Soviet actors as attempting to defend their basic security needs but as fanatical atheists bent on confronting the United States and its capitalist allies. “Soviet Communism teaches that the capitalist system of the so-called ‘imperialist’ nations depends on recurrent war.” American citizens needed to be aware that “We are up against something that is formidable.” Nothing, Dulles insisted, would make the defeat of Americans “more certain” than “indifference.” Completely abandoning his 1946 article’s premise, albeit without mentioning it, Dulles later found that there “is no illusion greater or more dangerous than that Soviet intentions can be deflected by persuasion.” Rather than countering the Soviet Union with rationality and persuasion and rather than serving the world as a model of justice, Dulles found that “Power is the key to success in dealing with the Soviet leadership.” Such power would consist not only in military power but also in economic power and the power of “moral judgment and world opinion.” The world could trust that when the United States built up its military it would not be doing so for self-interested reasons. In words that would be echoed by political leaders for decades to come, Dulles assured Americans that “All the free nations of the world want the United States to be strong.”

If atheism was the Soviet Union’s grounding premise, this “premise” did not suddenly originate in the years between 1946 and 1950. The Soviet Union was
just as atheistic in 1946 when Dulles argued for its rationality and openness to persuasion as it was in 1950 when Dulles argued that the Soviet Union must be opposed by military force. The Soviet Union did not change its ideology in those four years. John Foster Dulles changed his.93

But even in 1950 John Foster Dulles was not yet the full-blown cold warrior he would soon become. In War or Peace, Dulles had not fully decided that the Soviet Union was necessarily a military threat to the United States or that its military had hostile intent.94 In 1950, the danger he described seems to have been rooted in the spiritual threat of atheism rather than in a military threat posed by the Soviet army. Thus far, “there has been little to suggest that the Soviet Union intends now to use the Red Army as an actually attacking force.”95

By the 1990s, it had become common for both Republicans and Democrats to praise the foreign policy accomplishments of the Truman administration. Democrats often portray him as a forthright leader who overcame the attacks of his opponents and showed strength and resilience in the face of low poll numbers and the demagoguery of Douglas MacArthur. For Republicans, Truman is often portrayed as one of those rare “good” Democrats who, like Senator Scoop Jackson, fully appreciated the dangers from abroad. He had the courage to use nuclear weapons when it was necessary, and he helped oversee the establishment of the American national security system from NATO to the National Security Act, to the Department of Defense. When presidents of either party, Republican or Democratic, slump in public approval rankings, they will invariably identify themselves with the feisty Missourian who held steady when times were rough and whose triumph is blessed with historical hindsight.

There was a time, however, when Republicans were not so admiring of Truman.

Only a few months after Dulles published War or Peace, the leading Republican members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee issued a harshly-worded statement about the Truman administration’s failure to respond to Soviet threats that was far more aggressive than Dulles had been only a few months earlier.96 While American combat troops were under fire by communists in Korea, five prominent Republican senators, including Bourke B. Hickenlooper, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., Arthur H. Vandenberg, Alexander Wiley, and H. Alexander Smith harshly attacked President Truman and his foreign policy.97 In their public statement, the five senators identified what they called the “major tragedy” of their time. This “major tragedy” was not the deaths of more than 50,000,000 people in World War II, nor the murders of millions of Jews during the Holocaust, nor the devastation of Europe during the war, nor the dropping of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nor the continuing malnutrition and starvation in the world.

The major tragedy of our time was the failure and refusal of American leadership in 1945 to recognize the true aims and methods of the rulers of Soviet Russia. To this failure can be traced the disintegration of our armed forces in 1945, which would
not have occurred if the need for retaining adequate forces had been explained to the American people. . . .

To this failure also can be traced the blindness of our leadership in ignoring the Communist attempt to capture the minds of men. . . .

The American people will not now excuse those responsible for these blunders . . .

In place of ineptitude, American strength and integrity must become the major encouragement for purposeful unity among those peoples who, possessing freedom themselves, seek to extend it to others. Then, and only then, will the military victory and the moral leadership which we achieved in 1945—and then lost in that same year—be translated into concrete results for humanity. . . .

For the attainment of such aims we will hold the Administration strictly responsible. 98

This harsh statement, including accusations of ignorance, blindness, and ineptitude, was issued while the United States was at war with communist countries. 99 The statement makes no mention of the major national security efforts under the Truman administration: the National Security Act of 1947, the selective service act of 1948, the creation of NATO, 100 the issuance of the new national security strategy ("NSC-68") that would guide U.S. foreign policy for decades, the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949, nor the creation of new government entities (including the Department of Defense, the Department of the Air Force, the Atomic Energy Commission, the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, or the National Security Agency). Nor did the statement mention that a year earlier President Truman had recommended the highest peacetime military budget in American history. Nor did it mention that he had announced the development of the hydrogen bomb in January 1950. 101 Nor did it mention the fact that the Republican members of Congress in 1945 had criticized Truman for not demobilizing quickly enough in 1945 and that they had threatened to terminate the military draft if Truman did not demobilize faster.

These attacks by Republican senators in 1950 would in fact more accurately have targeted the 1946 writings of their party’s ostensible foreign policy authority, John Foster Dulles, than the Truman administration’s national security policies between 1947 and 1950. And, inasmuch as Dulles had not yet concluded in War or Peace that the Soviet Union was definitely going to be a major military threat to the United States and that American military power must be increased dramatically, the criticisms also could have aimed at his book released only a few months earlier.

If Dulles wanted to be the conductor of the Republican Party’s foreign policy train, which was about to depart in the direction signaled by the senators’ statement, he would quickly need to jump aboard. Dulles jumped.

John Foster Dulles soon became the principal draftsman of the foreign policy plank of the Republican Party Platform in 1952. The 1952 platform in turn made the senators’ 1950 statement excoriating Truman seem mild by comparison.
The allegations were no longer limited to the administration’s blindness and ineptitude. The Republican Party, largely under the pen of Dulles, accused the Truman administration of protecting traitors. The Republican platform said about the now-admired Truman administration:

We charge that they have shielded traitors to the Nation in high places, and that they have created enemies abroad where we should have friends.

Here at home they have exhibited corruption, incompetence, and disloyalty in public office to such an extent that the very concept of free representative government has been tarnished and has lost its idealistic appeal to those elsewhere who are confronted with the propaganda of Communism.

By the Administration’s appeasement of Communism at home and abroad it has permitted Communists and their fellow travelers to serve in many key agencies and to infiltrate our American life.

Not only did the administration shield traitors, but it weakened the United States in the face of the communists. “The moral incentives and hopes for a better world which sustained us through World War II were betrayed, and this has given Communist Russia a military and propaganda initiative which, if unstayed, will destroy us.” These betrayals have directly led to the weakening of the United States’ position in the world.

The present Administration, in seven years, has squandered the unprecedented power and prestige which were ours at the close of World War II.

We charge that the leaders of the Administration in power lost the peace so dearly earned by World War II.

Those in control of the Party in power have, in reality, no foreign policy. They swing erratically from timid appeasement to reckless bluster.

The American people must now decide whether to continue in office the party which has presided over this disastrous reversal of our fortunes and the loss of our hopes for a peaceful world.

In contrast to the traitor-shielding Democrats, there are “no Communists in the Republican Party…we never compromised with Communism and we have fought to expose it and to eliminate it in government and American life.” Dulles’s political party has “always recognized Communism” for what it is: “a world conspiracy against freedom and religion.” The best way to challenge this conspiracy against religion is by means of an “enlightened self-interest [that is] animated by courage, self-respect, steadfastness, vision, purpose, competence and spiritual faith.” When this new religious vision is implemented, “Our nation will become again the dynamic, moral and spiritual force which was the despair of despots and the hope of the oppressed.”

The John Foster Dulles of 1952 would have been unrecognizable to the John Foster Dulles of 1946. The 1946 foreign policy spokesman cautioned against an American military buildup that would be seen as provocative. Only six years later, after the United States had already engaged in the largest “peace-time” military buildup in its history, had entered into a series of global military
alliances, sent its armed forces six thousand miles and fought the invading Chinese and North Koreans to a standstill in their own back yard, Dulles no longer saw the danger of an American military buildup provoking a counter-response from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, the 1952 platform stated, understands only strength, not reason.

On the prudent assumption that Communist Russia may not accommodate our own disgracefully-lagging program for preparedness, we should develop with utmost speed a force-in-being, as distinguished from paper plans, of such power as to deter sudden attack or promptly and decisively defeat it. This defense against sudden attack requires the quickest possible development of appropriate and completely-adequate air power and the simultaneous readiness of coordinated air, land, and sea forces, with all necessary installations, bases, supplies and munitions, including atomic energy weapons in abundance.

The terms used in these planks of the 1952 platform prepared by Dulles are extraordinary. President Truman is accused of having “squandered power and prestige,” “lost the peace,” “betrayed” the American people, been guilty of “timid appeasement” (“appeasement” being the term used to describe those who would not stand up to Hitler), engaged in “reckless bluster,” prompted a “disastrous reversal of our fortunes,” and relied on a “disgracefully-lagging program for preparedness.” Because of these failures, the communists are now ready to “destroy us” and to continue their “world conspiracy against freedom and religion.” The Republicans promise to bring not only the needed “spiritual faith” but to “develop with utmost speed” enough “air, land, and sea forces, with all necessary installations” of military power, “including atomic energy weapons in abundance” to be able to “decisively defeat” the communists if necessary. In response to the communist-ridden Democratic Party and State Department, the Republicans would stand tall against communism. Americans should contrast the “spiritual faith” of the Republicans against the timidity and appeasement of the Democrats. All of these scathing denunciations were being made while American soldiers were in “harm’s way” on the Korean peninsula.

The Republican Party was now ready to nominate its candidate for president, a five-star general, who was prepared to launch spiritual weapons against America’s foes.

The FCC versus the FCC: Theologians and the Atomic Bomb

The 1952 Republican Party Platform that attacked President Truman’s foreign policy also insisted that the United States should manufacture an “abundance” of nuclear weapons. The advisability of the United States accumulating massive stockpiles of nuclear weapons, which ultimately became the conventional wisdom and a core feature of a bipartisan U.S. defense policy, was not at all self-evident to Americans in 1946.

While American public opinion has always been divided on the question whether atomic bombs should have been detonated over the populations of
Hiroshima and Nagasaki, initially the clear majority of the public strongly supported their use in order to bring a quick end to the war and to save Americans the cost of bloody assaults on the Japanese home islands. There were, however, many notable political, military, and scientific figures who initially believed that the dropping of the bombs was either unnecessary or immoral, including General Dwight D. Eisenhower, General Douglas MacArthur, Admiral William F. Halsey, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, John Foster Dulles, and Albert Einstein.\(^{104}\)

Though Americans had suffered far fewer casualties than had their European and Asian allies and enemies, and although the war had lasted for Americans only three and one-half years, they nevertheless were quite ready for a decisive end of the fighting and a return to normality. President Truman always believed that the use of the atomic bomb was necessary to save American lives from what was anticipated to be a series of bloody amphibious invasions of the Japan. The atomic blast was a miraculous denouement that brought about a clean and decisive end to the war with a saving of human life.

Press reports in the United States immediately after the bombings led Americans to think that the bomb’s effects were largely limited to the initial blast. There were few published reports in the American press on the gruesome effects of atomic radiation. Some reporters who visited the devastated cities shortly after described the radiation effects—still poorly understood—but their reports were not widely distributed and were even cut by their editors. The U.S. government took many steps to suggest that there were no harmful effects beyond the decisive blast itself. The casualties at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were of course overwhelmingly civilian, though the cities unquestionably had military value and they did include military industrial plants, though in Nagasaki they were sufficiently outside the center of the city so as to suffer much less damage than the flattened civilian targets. Americans were somewhat numbed from the moral implications of bombing cities, rather than clear military targets, in part for the reason that it had long been part of allied strategy to do so, most famously in Dresden, Berlin, Hamburg, and Tokyo. Their enemies also had shown little reluctance to destroy cities as a part of their military strategies. Thus there was nothing unusual about American and allied planes destroying cities from the air. The atomic bomb simply did it more quickly and decisively—and the immediate Japanese surrender seemed to underscore the wisdom and value of deploying the new device.\(^{105}\)

It was in this context of a public that initially supported the bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that the Federal Council of Churches acted. Just as it had created Dulles’s Commission on a Just and Durable Peace in 1942 to imagine the look of a postwar world, so it also assembled immediately after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki a group of theologians and religious scholars to inquire into the morality of the use and manufacture of nuclear weapons. Named the “Commission on the Relation of the Church to the War in the Light of the Christian Faith,” it was chaired by the “erudite but cautious” Professor Robert L. Calhoun of Yale Divinity School.\(^{106}\) Among those serving on the commission
were some of America’s leading theologians and religious figures: Edwin E. Aubrey (Crozer Theological Seminary), John C. Bennett (Union Theological Seminary), Conrad J.I. Bergendorf (Augustana College and Theological Seminary), Angus Dun (Bishop of the Episcopal Church), Theodore M. Greene (Princeton University), Walter M. Horton (Oberlin), Benjamin E. Mays (Morgan State College), as well as the single most famous and influential American theologian of the time, Professor Reinhold Niebuhr. The commission issued its first statement, known at the time as the “Calhoun Report,” at the FCC’s annual meeting in 1946 in Columbus, Ohio.

After scouring the scriptures and consulting the leading theological and moral writings of the day, the Calhoun Commission concluded: “As far as our best minds can see, the only promising defenses against atomic warfare are moral and political, not physical defenses. This momentous fact is fundamental in our present situation.” The 1946 Calhoun Report concluded that it was morally and theologically wrong for the United States to have used an atomic bomb, particularly on cities, and that the United States should not develop, stockpile, or deploy nuclear weapons in the future.

With memories of the war already beginning to fade, and as information about the radiation horrors caused by the nuclear blasts and its lingering gruesome consequences, the public mood began to shift against the use of the bomb. In 1947, the intrepid Republican Congresswoman Clare Booth Luce, later to become a cold warrior extraordinaire, wrote in *McCall’s* magazine that she opposed the use of nuclear weapons. Regardless of whether the Calhoun Report or Mrs. Luce’s opinion influenced public sentiment against any future hypothetical use of the bomb, they did reflect a brief moment in time where Americans recoiled at the horrible consequences of using weapons that could in one flash cause the deaths of hundreds of thousands of human beings and that could leave the legacy of radiation poisoning for future generations.

By 1950, however, Americans returned to their original position and once again approved of the earlier use of atomic weapons against Japan, and a majority of the public has largely held to that position ever since. One particularly noteworthy bellwether of the shift back towards reliance on nuclear weapons came from an unlikely source: the same theologians who had written in 1946 to oppose the bomb. In 1950, the FCC created yet another special commission to once again advise on the religious dimensions of essentially the same question that had been addressed in 1946: whether it would be ethical to use nuclear weapons in wartime. Curiously, most of the members of the 1950 commission were the same as those who had served in 1946, including notably Reinhold Niebuhr and all of those identified above (except Professor Robert Calhoun). Although the commission members were largely the same, their report dramatically reversed their major recommendations from those of 1946. Without referring even once to their earlier report on essentially the same topic, the new commission concluded only four years later:
As long as the existing situation holds, for the United States to abandon its atomic weapons, or to give the impression that they would not be used, would leave the non-communist world with totally inadequate defense. For Christians to advocate such a policy would be for them to share responsibility for the world-wide tyranny that might result. We believe that American military strength, which must include atomic weapons as long as any other nation may possess them, is an essential factor in the possibility of preventing both world war and tyranny. 109

In 1946, it was morally unacceptable for American Christians to manufacture atomic weapons or even to suggest that they might ever be used. By 1950, it was morally obligatory for American Christians to manufacture atomic weapons and to threaten their use if the situation warranted it. Although the original text of the Holy Bible had not changed by as much as one word in the intervening four years, the interpretation of its meaning for the United States and its defense strategy in the crucible of the times was turned on its head.

Much of the text in the 1946 and 1950 FCC reports is fully interchangeable and expresses deeply felt efforts to grapple with the moral implications of the massive destructiveness of atomic weapons, and many of the smaller recommendations were the same. There nevertheless was a decisive shift at the critical point of how Americans should protect themselves from external threats. Both texts demand that dangers be faced with carefully considered realism and prudence and without sentimental hoping or wishing (obviously reflecting Niebuhr’s long-held beliefs). But the first text puts its ultimate faith in God and demanded that American policymakers take every effort that they could to end the scourge of war. In 1946, genuine Christian commitment was interpreted as requiring a principled abandonment of the use of nuclear weapons and the strongest of efforts to destroy all stockpiles. Indeed, in 1946, “the only promising defenses against atomic warfare are moral and political, not physical defenses” (emphasis added). Ironically, at the same time that American politicians were declaring that spiritual values should be the country’s “first line of defense,” theologians were beginning to declare that the armed forces and nuclear weapons should be the first line of defense. By 1950, those who genuinely wanted to prevent war were no longer instructed to place their faith ultimately in God but in American military power. Failure to trust in American military strength—the “physical defenses” that were explicitly repudiated in 1946—would result in “world-wide tyranny.” For the theologians of 1946, it was “In God we trust.” In 1950, it was “In bombs we trust.”

The “Iron Curtain” Speech Lands Like a Lead Balloon

In one of the coincidences that history generously serves to its students, President Truman happened to be the featured speaker at the FCC annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio, on the exact day and in the exact place that the FCC released the original Calhoun Report condemning the use of the atomic bomb. President Truman arrived in Columbus that morning on an overnight train from Fulton, Missouri. On the previous day, March 5, 1946, Truman had participated
at a ceremony at Westminster College where former British Prime Minister Win-
ston Churchill was awarded an honorary degree. Truman heard one of the most
famous men of his time offer one of the most famous metaphors in one of the
most famous speeches ever delivered in the United States. One day before the
FCC theologians urged Americans to pursue moral rather than physical defenses,
Churchill, standing next to President Truman, warned:

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended
across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of
Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade,
Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in
what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not
only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in some cases, increasing measure
of control from Moscow.

Evoking the specter of Hitler, who also had seized by force the ancient capitals
of Central and Eastern Europe, Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” was to become the
single most vivid and enduring metaphor of the boundary between the states
dominated by the Soviet Union and those of Western Europe. But not yet.

Although the Iron Curtain metaphor would soon rise to iconic status in Ameri-
can rhetoric, it landed in 1946 like a lead balloon. *Time* magazine reported on the
speech as if it were an exasperated nephew who was annoyed by the eccen-
tricities of a senile uncle who could no longer stop himself from obsessively
repeating stories from his past. In its report on Churchill’s speech, entitled “This
Sad & Breathless Moment,” *Time* surveyed American public reaction and
concluded that most American newspapers
generally viewed with distaste and alarm the kind of military marriage proposed by
Churchill. The consensus: such an alliance would only provoke Russian suspicion,
already acute, and pull the props of trust and confidence right out from under [the
United Nations]—or so they feared.

*Time* magazine, the voice of Henry Luce (a future cold warrior whose wife was
at that moment denouncing the use of atomic weapons), dismissed Churchill’s
words as being anachronistic. *Time* in 1946 reflected the attitudes of Dulles in
1946. And both reflected broad American sentiments of the time. Truman’s
March 6 speech at the FCC was broadcast live by radio to the entire nation. He
did not even mention the Iron Curtain speech he had heard the day before.110

Writing just two years later, in 1948, Reinhold Niebuhr noted that there had
been a transformation in American attitudes regarding the Iron Curtain speech.
He reminded his readers of the initial harsh reactions with which Americans
received the unwelcome message brought by the former prime minister. “One
need only remember the hysterical protests against Churchill’s Fulton speech,
the main outline of which has subsequently, by dire necessity, become the settled
policy of the Western world, to recognize how recent is our conversion from the
sentimental hopes of yesterday.”111
The same type of transformation of thought that took place between 1946 and 1950 in the public writings of John Foster Dulles, in the earnest words of the theologians on the atomic bomb, and throughout the popular press regarding Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech, was also taking place inside the world of national security secrets and classified documents. Two of the most famous and influential national security documents drafted during the Cold War were the “Long Telegram” (February 22, 1946) by George F. Kennan, and “NSC-68” (April 14, 1950) entitled “A Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary on United States Objectives and Programs for National Security,” which was written largely by Paul Nitze.112

When Kennan wrote the Long Telegram in 1946, he was a foreign service officer in his early forties based in Moscow. The telegram, lengthy by the standards of the time, warned his State Department colleagues of what he argued were the insufficiently understood dangers of the Soviet Union. Written less than two weeks before Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech, Kennan warned of the Kremlin’s “neurotic view of world affairs” that was based on traditional Russian “insecurity” and “fears.” The Soviets have learned “to seek security only in patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power, never in compacts and compromises with it.” The country “is more dangerous and insidious than ever before.” Soviet actions internationally will be “negative and destructive in character.” Kennan’s telegram is often credited with raising alarm bells inside the State Department and the Pentagon and having prompted a reevaluation of American policy towards the Soviet Union. According to John Lewis Gaddis, one of the closest scholars of the period, the Long Telegram formed “the basis for United States strategy toward the Soviet Union throughout the rest of the Cold War.”113

While Kennan certainly warned in stark terms of the dangers, neuroses, and powers of the Soviet Union and called upon officials to take the Soviet threat seriously, the response that he proposed emphasized America’s use of political, economic, and ideological responses to its adversary. He noted that “peaceful and mutually profitable coexistence of capitalist and socialist states is entirely possible.” He declared that the Kremlin’s leadership sought autocratic power inside Russia and that it would use surrounding states not for the purpose of launching military adventures abroad but for buffering it against hostile attacks from the outside. Kennan did not warn of the necessity of building up the U.S. armed forces to respond to military threats but of the need to prepare for the “greatest task our diplomacy has ever faced.” This diplomatic challenge was not perceived as being insurmountable. The “problem is within our power to solve—and that [it can be solved] without recourse to any general military conflict.” With regard to the danger of Soviet propaganda abroad, Kennan believed that it “should therefore be relatively easy to combat it by any intelligent and really constructive program.” The telegram warned against frightening the American public with exaggerated pronouncements of the danger of the Soviet Union but urged instead that education be founded “entirely on [a] realistic and matter
of fact basis.” Ultimately, the real strength of the United States could be found in the “health and vigor of our own society.” Americans will be more influential abroad if they “improve self confidence, discipline, morale and community spirit.” The “greatest danger that can befall us in coping with this problem of Soviet Communism,” Kennan warned in the last sentence of his 1946 telegram, was “that we shall allow ourselves to become like those with whom we are coping.”

Kennan’s influence rose so quickly that he was called back from his post in Moscow and placed at the head of the State Department’s office of policy planning. The following year, he published a revised and unclassified version of the telegram in the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs* under the title “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.” Writing under the pseudonym of Mr. X, he outlined a policy of “containment” to restrain the Soviet Union that was harsher and more forceful and that would require “counterforce at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points.” Although concluding his outline of containment on a different note from the Long Telegram, it remained one of continuing optimism in American qualities that were different from military power.

In the light of these circumstances, the thoughtful observer of Russian-American relations will find no cause for complaint in the Kremlin’s challenge to American society. He will rather experience a certain gratitude to a Providence which, by providing the American people with this implacable challenge, has made their entire security as a nation dependent on their pulling themselves together and accepting the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear.114

Kennan would subsequently and alternatively be praised or condemned by Cold War theorists for promoting a doctrine of military containment. However much Kennan should be praised or condemned for his analyses in 1946 and 1947, which were not altogether different from those of John Foster Dulles during this period, his successor at the State Department would articulate an approach that more closely resembled the Dulles of 1950 and 1952.

Paul Nitze became the head of policy planning at the State Department upon Kennan’s departure in 1950. Following a directive from President Truman on January 31, Nitze prepared the “top secret” NSC-68 that ultimately became the official (albeit classified) statement of American national security strategy during the Cold War. NSC-68, unlike Kennan’s two famous writings, squarely identified the Soviet Union as an immediate and dangerous military threat to the United States that must be resisted forcefully by means of a significant buildup of American military power. Whereas the Kennan of 1946 and the Dulles of 1946 had analyzed Soviet behavior in terms of its history, psychology, politics, and national interests, NSC-68, like the Dulles of 1952 and the Adlai Stevenson of 1952, analyzed the Soviet Union in starkly religious, aggressive, and apocalyptic terms. The top secret bureaucratic document declared in unsober terms:

The Soviet Union, unlike previous aspirants to hegemony, is animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own, and seeks to impose its absolute authority over
the rest of the world. Conflict has, therefore, become endemic and is waged, on the part of the Soviet Union, by violent or non-violent methods in accordance with the dictates of expediency. With the development of increasingly terrifying weapons of mass destruction, every individual faces the ever-present possibility of annihilation should the conflict enter the phase of total war.

“Antithetical” to our own . . . what? To our own “faith”? To our own “new fanatic faith”? NSC-68 declared that in the Soviet Union, the “system becomes God, and submission to the will of God becomes submission to the will of the system.” The leaders of that country are “evil men who have enslaved” the Russian people. Those leaders no longer are governed by their fears, insecurities, and neuroses that Kennan identified. “The Kremlin uses Soviet military power to back up and serve the Kremlin design. It does not hesitate to use military force aggressively if that course is expedient in the achievement of its design.” The nuance of the Long Telegram is gone. The Soviet system “is inescapably militant because it possesses and is possessed by a Russian imperialism and because it is a totalitarian dictatorship. Persistent crisis, conflict and expansion are the essence of the Kremlin’s militancy.” And, finally, the ultimate danger: “The Soviet Union is developing the military capacity to support its design for world domination.”

In contrast to the Soviet Union’s having a calculated plan for world domination, we Americans suffer from the “handicaps” that are the “very virtues of our system.” We are governed by the values outlined in the “Preamble to the Constitution” and the “Bill of Rights,” which “assure the integrity and vitality of our free society, which is founded upon the dignity and worth of the individual.” Because of America’s virtues and Soviet vices—both of which NSC-68 sets out in stark and uncompromising terms—the necessary recourse for the United States is to begin a massive increase in its military forces. It is “imperative” that there be “a much more rapid and concerted build-up of the actual strength of both the United States and the other nations of the free world. The analysis shows that this will be costly and will involved significant domestic financial and economic adjustments.”

Although the military threat posed by the Soviet Union certainly had increased following its acquiring nuclear capabilities in 1949, its intentions had not undergone a transformation between 1946 and 1950 comparable to the strikingly different assessments of its intentions. And so again the question arises: was it the Soviet Union that had undergone a dramatic change between 1946 and 1950 or was it Americans who had changed? And what was to become of Kennan’s warning, expressed in the last sentence of the Long Telegram, cautioning us not to falter or “allow ourselves to become like those with whom we are coping”? One year later, in March of 1947, President Truman issued his Executive Order 9835 requiring all federal employees to take a “loyalty oath”—as if unscrupulous communists could at least be trusted to tell the truth to loyalty boards. And only two months before the State Department produced NSC-68, Senator Joseph McCarthy, in a speech to the Republican women of Wheeling,
West Virginia, denounced the president for coddling communists over at the State Department—the very building where Paul Nitze was at that moment drafting NSC-68. In early 1950, just as George Kennan was leaving government service from which he felt increasingly alienated, Senator McCarthy’s career was about to take off and earn him warm plaudits from those who hated the freedom-suppressing behavior of militarist communist governments.
We have, in fact, a special social system of our own. . . . It is not capitalism, or socialism, or syndicalism, nor a cross breed of them. Like most Americans, I refuse to be damned by anybody’s word-classification of it, such as “capitalism.”

—Herbert Hoover, 1922 (reprinted 1934) ¹

Despite corrections in the marketplace and instances of abuse, democratic capitalism is the best system ever devised.

—President George W. Bush
September 24, 2008

Capitalism had few friends among a group of ministers and Protestant Episcopal lay leaders at a luncheon forum yesterday. . . . “The present economic system as a whole is unchristian and impossible of operation along humanitarian lines,” [according to the Reverend Bradford Young]. “The present economic order is based on greed.”

—New York Times, November 20, 1932

Jesus taught the value of private property.

—The Reverend Billy Graham, early 1950s²

For Reagan, capitalism took on religious dimensions. . . . Any economic event or theory that purported to grant the federal government more power over the individual was not merely faulty for statistical reasons. It was faulty for the inherent immorality of denying the individual freedom in his/her daily economic endeavors. [An attack] on free market capitalism was an attack on God and the Founding Fathers.

—Amos Kiewe and Davis W. Houck³
Looking Backward: Socialists in Our Midst

The first version of the “Pledge of Allegiance” was not written by the U.S. Congress but in 1892 by a socialist named Francis Bellamy who previously had been a Baptist preacher. While the terms “socialist” and “Baptist preacher” might have been oxymorons in the 1980s, it was not the case in the 1890s. The socialist author of the now-revered American Pledge of Allegiance had a cousin, Edward Bellamy, who also was a socialist and was the son of a Baptist preacher. Cousin Edward had recently become quite famous as the author of a bestselling utopian novel entitled *Looking Backward: 2000–1887*. The hero of Bellamy’s novel, Julian West, fell into a deep sleep in Boston in the year 1887 and awoke 113 years later in exactly the same spot on September 10, 2000. The newly awakened Massachusetts Yankee was astonished by the transformations that had taken place in Boston during the intervening years. The imaginary Boston of 2000 enjoyed free universal education, lacked economic competition, suffered no child labor or labor strikes (because the workers were well paid they had no need for strikes), and guaranteed its citizens food, clothing, and shelter. The state was the sole owner of capital, which it benignly distributed to all according to their needs—which was not difficult because the new society had already eliminated competition and avarice. Indeed, there was no need to be greedy because no one had or wanted more than was necessary to live a full, rich, and meaningful life.

Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* includes a discussion between Julian West, from the Boston of 1887, and one Dr. Leete, an inhabitant of Boston in the futuristic year of 2000. West expressed to Leete his astonishment at the enormous power now assumed by the state and he contrasted it with the limited role that government had played in the nineteenth century. “In my day,” the newly awakened West explained,

> “it was considered that the proper functions of government, strictly speaking, were limited to keeping the peace and defending the people against the public enemy, that is, to the military and police powers.”

> “And, in heaven’s name, who are the public enemies?” exclaimed Dr. Leete. “Are they France, England, Germany, or hunger, cold, and nakedness? In your day [the 1880s] governments were accustomed, on the slightest international misunderstanding, to seize upon the bodies of citizens and deliver them over by hundreds of thousands to death and mutilation, wasting their treasures the while like water; and all this oftenest for no imaginable profit to the victims. We have no wars now, and our governments no war powers, but in order to protect every citizen against hunger, cold, and nakedness, and provide for all his physical and mental needs, the function is assumed of directing his industry for a term of years. No, Mr. West, I am sure on reflection you will perceive that it was in your age, not in ours, that the extension of the functions of governments was extraordinary.”

In the nineteenth-century world that had formed Julian West, it was considered normal and proper for the state to use its power to conscript young men into
military service (at least in wartime) and send them off to foreign lands to kill or be killed. If these conscripted men did their duty, they would be praised by society as being patriots who served their country. If wounded or killed, they would be deemed heroes. But at the same time that the government was empowered to conscript its citizens to take up arms in war, it was considered (by many) to be immoral and an abusive of power if the same government were to draft its citizens to build hospitals, schools, or work to improve the lives of the poor and homeless. These latter conscripts would not be considered heroes of a progressive society but slaves of a totalitarian state. For a government to require its young men to fight a war was deemed an unquestioned right of the state; but if a government were to require its citizens to build hospitals or to care for the poor it would be considered tyrannical and oppressive. While this order of things was widely accepted in a “Christian country,” it was not clear from where such values could be found in scripture, especially if the reader were a socialist. The 1888 novel Looking Backward was an instant success in the United States. More than 1,000,000 copies of the book were sold, which would have been an enormous accomplishment even in the year 2000. Bellamy clubs popped up around the country to promote his ideas and groups formed to try to implement his socialist aspirations.

Bellamy’s success, however, was soon dwarfed by the literary sensation unleashed by the Congregational minister Charles Sheldon who published in 1896 a novel entitled In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do? Sheldon’s novel became one of the bestselling books in the history of the United States up through the 1950s. More than 30,000,000 copies were printed, which would have made Sheldon a very rich man if only his publisher had properly registered the copyright. The real-life minister-novelist Sheldon told the story of a fictional minister-preacher, the Reverend Henry Maxwell, who came to realize that neither his sermons nor his congregation took the teachings of Jesus very seriously. The fictional Reverend Maxwell decided that he must abandon his life of conventional Christianity and begin to implement the true message of Jesus Christ. In his last sermon, the spiritually reborn preacher challenges his congregation:

What would Jesus do in the matter of wealth? How would He spend it? What principle would regulate His use of money? Would He be likely to live in great luxury and spend ten times as much on personal adornment and entertainment as He spent to relieve the needs of suffering humanity? How would Jesus be governed in the making of money? Would He take rentals from saloons and other disreputable property, or even from tenement property that was so constructed that the inmates had no such thing as a home and no such possibility as privacy or cleanliness?\(^5\)

Just as the novel Looking Backward launched a popular movement with real world consequences, so did In His Steps. The idea for what became the “Social Gospel” movement began when the theologian Walter Rauschenbusch read Sheldon’s story about the Reverend Maxwell. Another major player in the Social Gospel movement was the real-life Reverend Washington Gladden, a
Congregational minister living in Columbus, Ohio. In 1905, Gladden published *Christianity and Socialism*, where he candidly acknowledged the faults of some existing forms of socialism but suggested that the better reference point would be that of “true Socialism.”6 He argued, however, that what was most important was to recognize the faults of the existing social system, which permitted poverty for the many while consigning wealth to the few. “The inequality of conditions, steadily increasing—pauperism growing as wealth grows; men by the million standing idle in the market places, for years at a time, while granaries are bursting and warehouses are groaning with the goods for lack of which the idle toilers are starving.”7 All this in a country that prided itself for being Christian. If this situation was to be improved it, it would require society to move in the direction of “scientific Socialism.”8

The year after the Reverend Gladden published *Christianity and Socialism*, Upton Sinclair, another self-professed socialist, also hit the bestseller list with his book *The Jungle* (1906), which exposed both the unsavory working conditions and the unsanitary byproducts of the Chicago meat-packing business. *The Jungle* was an immediate political and literary success. The popular reaction to the book was so overwhelming that the U.S. Congress, responding to the public clamor, enacted within a few months of its publication, the Pure Food and Drugs Act, which was one of the first of what became many governmental efforts in what the Reverend Gladden had described as the “direction” of socialism. The new law led to the creation of the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA)—one of the first entities of the U.S. government created for the purpose of promoting the health and welfare of American citizens. (When the FDA celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2006, it paid tribute to the man whom it candidly acknowledged was a socialist agitator.9) Royalties from *The Jungle* allowed Sinclair to establish an institution he named Helicon Hall, a cooperative-living venture whose renown enticed the aspiring writer Sinclair Lewis, also a socialist and an agnostic, to come into residence. At Helicon Hall, Upton Sinclair taught Sinclair Lewis the skill of writing. The student subsequently became a prolific writer in his own right. Sinclair Lewis mocked small-town businessmen (*Babbitt*), exposed petty and corrupt preachers whose scam was absconding with the money of all-too-trusting believers (*Elmer Gantry*), and insulted doctors who paid more attention to money than to medicine (*Arrowsmith*). Lewis’s *Main Street*, which recounts life in middle America, was a literary sensation that skewered small town provincialism. It sold more than two million copies. Lewis’s literary success was crowned when he became the first American to win the Nobel Prize in literature.

Socialists in the first half of the twentieth century were more influential than they were numerous. Socialists, organizing under that name, were never sufficiently large on a national scale to have much of an effect on major electoral contests. One of the most popular and best-known socialists of the twentieth century, the widely respected Norman Thomas, “emerged as the premier American social democrat, the spokesman for a non-Marxist brand of socialism which offered
itself as an alternative to both communism and twentieth-century capitalism.”10 Thomas, the son of a Presbyterian minister and himself a member of the clergy until 1917, ran for president six times under the Socialist Party banner but never received even as much as one percent of the popular vote. On his 65th birthday, the New York Times noted that there “are not many men in American public life today who command greater esteem or fewer votes than Norman Thomas.”11 While never garnering much in the way of electoral support, socialist ideas had an influence on American politics in the first half of the century that was disproportionate to the number of socialism’s acknowledged adherents.12

The churches, though eschewing officially the doctrine of socialism, also actively promoted social welfare programs that urged the government to step in and regulate the robust laissez-faire economy that allowed some to become rich while consigning others to lives of poverty and despair. In 1908, at the founding meeting of the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), the predecessor organization of what is now the National Council of Churches (NCC), issued a report on Christian social ideals and established a commission to investigate working conditions in the United States and to make recommendations on how they could be improved. The 1908 report advocated “the protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational disease, injuries and mortality,” the abolition of child labor, elimination of sweat shops, a “living wage” and reduction of the number of hours and days worked, and laws to provide for the elderly and infirm.13 The statement made no comment about the virtues of capitalism, free enterprise, laissez-faire, private property, or tax cuts. Much to the dismay of Catholics and conservative Protestants, the mass media and politicians often treated FCC pronouncements throughout the first half of the twentieth century as if they were the voice of American Christianity, if not of religion itself. The FCC’s meetings, activities, elections, officers, and publications were widely covered in print journalism, and its reports and positions were deemed significant news items.

There were others in American Protestant Christianity at the beginning of the century who were not at all pleased by the increasing tendency to associate “true” socialism with “true” Christianity. Between 1910 and 1915, a group of conservative theologians published a series of more than 100 articles about Christianity in a series of articles known as The Fundamentals. In 1917, the articles were collected and republished in a four-volume set that was in turn widely distributed throughout the country. According to the series’ editors, “millions” of copies of The Fundamentals were distributed without cost. The series and its publication name was so successful that the term “fundamentalist” entered into the English lexicon for the first time to describe the movement within conservative Protestantism that favored biblical literalism and inerrancy.14

The majority of the articles in The Fundamentals focused, as would be expected, on questions of biblical interpretation, theology, and evangelism as they challenged the prevailing academic scholarship of the day. To those
familiar with the political activism of American fundamentalists after 1979, it might be surprising to learn that of the more than 100 articles published in the ground-breaking series, only one article focused on politics and economics: “The Church and Socialism” by Professor Charles R. Erdman of Princeton Theological Seminary.

Rather than denouncing socialism as atheistic, self-evidently false, and anathema to Christian values or the American way of life, as would become commonplace in the 1950s, the fundamentalist Erdman candidly acknowledged that socialism was the embodiment of “the creed and the hope of intelligent millions.” Erdman did not choose to equate socialism with communism, atheism, nihilism, or anarchy. While advancing several arguments against socialism, he did not portray it as a noxious doctrine that was inherently suspect and that must be repudiated by Bible-believing Christians; rather he presented it as a compelling ideology whose positive virtues had the worrying potential of seducing good Christians into wrongly believing that it could be a panacea for the ills of the world. “Most Christians admit,” Erdman said in language that would be incomprehensible to fundamentalists in the fifties, “the wisdom of many Socialistic proposals.” Positive examples of socialist practices in America, he acknowledged, included the public school system and the post office. Additional socialist doctrines might also be properly made. “Government ownership might be extended to the railroads, mines, public utilities, factories; this would not involve questions of religion, but of expediency and political wisdom, with which the church has nothing to do.”

Erdman the fundamentalist admitted that socialism correctly identified many injustices within the economic system. “Socialism...is a serious protest against the social wrongs and cruelties of the age, against the defects of the present economic system, against special privilege and entrenched injustice, against prevalent poverty, and hunger, and despair.” Erdman also acknowledged that some socialists were correct in criticizing those self-professed Christians who defended, in the name of Christianity, wealth that came from “watering of stocks and from wrecking railroads, and from grinding the faces of the poor.” While rejecting the argument that the first Christians adopted socialism among themselves, he nevertheless recognized that there was compelling evidence of socialist tendencies of many early believers who indeed attempted to share all of their wealth with each other. The Fundamentalist article praised socialism at least to the extent that it served as a reminder to Christians of the true teachings of Jesus, including to be just to the poor and to demand of themselves greater fidelity in their own actions. Erdman’s understanding of the practices of the early Christians was reasonably similar to that of John Winthrop’s “city on the hill” and quite unlike the “city on the hill” promoted by President Reagan. Christians must not defend “wrong practices” on the grounds that they “are necessitated by the industrial system of the age.”

By refusing to recognize the economic suffering that has been promoted in the name of Christianity, the fundamentalist Erdman wrote, the
Church is now being held responsible for social sins and injustice, for the wrongs and grievances of the age; and for this unfortunate position she must largely blame herself. She has arrogated functions which are not her own; she has made promises for which there is no written word of Scripture.  

Erdman’s ultimate warning was not against socialism per se but against any appeal to socialism that might undermine Christian activities and beliefs. “The Church leaves its members free to adopt or reject Socialism as they may deem wise. A man may be an ardent Socialist and a sincere Christian, or he may be a true Christian and a determined opponent of Socialism.” Erdman was less critical of socialism than he was of those “Christian socialists” who wished to reduce the teachings of Jesus Christ to a political doctrine. He also was harshly critical of those who abandoned (and sometimes attacked) religion in the name of an economic theory. While Erdman himself rejected socialism, he took pains to distinguish the potentially positive economic and political benefits it could produce from the damage that would be caused if Christianity were to be captured by any particular political ideology. He rejected socialism less because of its particular economic teachings and more because of his belief that no economic theory should substitute for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The church needed to be warned not only against being seduced by socialism but against all political parties and any economic theory. “As to Jesus Christ, it is impossible to identify Him with any social theory or political party. His teachings are of universal application and eternal validity; but they do not deal with the questions of political economy any more than with those of physical science.” Ultimately for Erdman, “the Church recognizes that it has no right to ally itself with any political party, or to commit itself to any one form of social or industrial organization.”  

During the Roaring Twenties, the term “capitalist” was likely to be understood by many Americans as a pejorative term rather than one that favorably described the American economic system. In 1922, then-Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover published a small book about the United States entitled American Individualism. In the book, which he republished in 1934 after completing his presidency (1929–1933), Hoover praised the American economic and social system—but distinguished it from capitalism. We have, in fact, a special social system of our own. We have made it ourselves from materials brought in revolt from conditions in Europe. We have lived it; we constantly improve it; we have seldom tried to define it. It abhors autocracy and does not argue with it, but fights it. It is not capitalism, or socialism, or syndicalism, nor a cross breed of them. Like most Americans, I refuse to be damned by anybody’s word-classification of it, such as “capitalism,” “plutocracy,” “proletariat” or “middle class,” or any other.  

The future president of the United States who would be associated in popular memory with an opposition to governmental intervention in the marketplace not only declined to have his beliefs associated with the word “capitalism,”
he explicitly repudiated it. “Capitalism,” he asserted, is one of those harmful economic systems where “a few men through unrestrained control of property determine the welfare of great numbers,” which makes it “far apart from the rightful expression of American individualism.” Hoover even praised the American system because it departed from classical capitalism and because Americans had constructively accepted many of the very governmental programs that had been promoted by the turn-of-the-century socialists.

Our mass of regulation of public utilities and our legislation against restraint of trade is the monument to our intent to preserve an equality of opportunity. This regulation is itself proof that we have gone a long way toward the abandonment of the “capitalism” of Adam Smith.

Governmental regulation of the economy in America, according to Herbert Hoover, promoted equality of opportunity and constituted an abandonment of capitalism.

When even Herbert Hoover (as secretary of commerce) refused to use the word “capitalism” in a positive way, its advocates needed some good arguments to promote it. One person in the mid-1920s who accepted the challenge of explaining and defending capitalism to the general public was an editor of the Encyclopedia Britannica named J.L. Garvin. Garvin published in 1926 an article entitled “The Case for Capitalism,” in which he promoted capitalism over socialism, which he described as “the ruling alternative.” Capitalism, he argued, is a “universal force” that is more “modern,” “creative,” “fertile,” and “more capable of raising the average level of material prosperity and happiness” than the socialist alternative. He asserted that the “freedom to undertake risk and accumulate possession is the breadth and life blood of this system.” (This is the language that Americans would later become accustomed to hearing to describe capitalism.) Curiously, in this attempt to explain capitalism to the public, Garvin’s defense of free enterprise failed to show even rudimentary familiarity with basic elementary concepts of “market,” “supply and demand,” “credit,” monetary policy, and “price theory,” and he certainly did not mention “general equilibrium theory.” He discussed only in passing the role of public corporations. For him capitalism seemed principally characterized as a system of manufacturing and selling that was conducted by people who accepted and thrived on risk—something like buccaneers with money. He essentially thought of capitalism as being a way to use money (capital) as a means of obtaining more money.

Garvin recognized that suspicions against capitalism were based on moral and religious objections. Whereas socialism appealed popularly to fairness in the distribution of wealth, appealed to the common good, and promoted better working conditions for laborers, capitalists were often portrayed as the “idle rich” who lived parasitically on wealth produced by others and as people who exploited society rather than contributed to the common good. In order to undercut these stereotypical notions, Garvin argued that there were enlightened capitalists who were genuinely concerned about the living conditions of the laborers who toiled
in their factories, and he encouraged other capitalists to emulate them. “In this fashion capitalism would realize in the end all that is sound in the practical ideals of socialism.” Thus Garvin believed that the best advertisement for capitalism came not from economic models showing that the wealth of all rises when capitalists are unfettered in the marketplace, but by showing to the world that many capitalists are moral, philanthropic, and sympathetic to the needs of the working class. Garvin did not promote the vital but unappreciated capitalist heroes like those of Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) but something more like Daddy Warbucks who, beneath all of his bluster, had a big heart, was generous to orphans, and paid his employees fairly.  

In November 1932, shortly after Franklin Roosevelt was elected president, a group of Episcopalians, both ministers and lay people, held a meeting in New York to discuss the economic crisis facing the country. The sentiment of the meeting was against the current economic order. “‘The present economic system as a whole is unchristian and impossible of operation along humanitarian lines,’ [according to the Reverend Bradford Young]. ‘The present economic order is based on greed.’” Earlier that year the Federal Council of Churches similarly had issued a widely noticed policy statement entitled “Social Ideals of the Churches.” While the document advocated neither “socialism” nor “capitalism,” its proposals and sentiments were unmistakable. The litany of recommendations of the most influential religious association in America more closely resembled Edward Bellamy’s imagined Boston of 2000 rather than the real one of 1887 (or 1932):

1. Practical application of the Christian principle of social well-being to the acquisition and use of wealth, subordination of speculation and the profit motive to the creative and cooperative spirit.
2. Social planning and control of the credit and monetary systems and the economic processes for the common good.
3. The right of all to the opportunity for self-maintenance; a wider and fairer distribution of wealth.
4. Safeguarding of all workers, urban and rural, against harmful conditions of labor and occupational injury and disease.
5. Social insurance against sickness, accident, want in old age and unemployment.

Like its 1908 predecessor (quoted above), the 1932 document by the FCC does not discuss the merits of the free-enterprise system. Its concluding statement, under the heading “A New Age of Faith,” asserted that even in the midst of the Great Depression, the problem of the United States was not a lack of “material resources nor technical skill—these we have in superabundance—but a dedication to the common good, a courage and unselfishness greater than are now manifest in American life.” The economy should not be organized on principles that permitted entrepreneurial individuals to succeed and “live the American dream” of hard work leading to prosperity. Rather, the American economy “must be a
manifestation of spiritual forces called out of the common life by the Spirit of God, called, let us hope, by the prophetic teaching of a consecrated Church, having as it objective the more abundant economic, cultural and spiritual life of humanity.”

In 1932, it seems, God was squarely in favor of governmental intervention in the marketplace. But God was preparing to change his mind, just as he had previously changed his mind on the morality of using nuclear weapons. Some new prophets of profits would shortly be presenting arguments that would convince many Americans that God was deeply opposed to governmental intervention in the economy. Curiously, two of the most influential economists who would help convince Americans of the immorality of governmental interference in the marketplace and the morality of free enterprise happened to be atheists: Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek.

“Capitalism and Freedom” versus “Socialism and Slavery”

On April 1, 1947, three weeks after the Truman Doctrine was announced, a group of 36 economists, philosophers, and journalists from Europe and the United States gathered for a 10-day conference at the Hôtel du Parc overlooking Lake Geneva in Switzerland. The idea to convene the meeting originated with Friedrich A. von Hayek, an Austrian economist who three years earlier had published *The Road to Serfdom*. Hayek’s book predicted that governmental regulation of business activity and governmental interference in the free market would inevitably lead to a necessarily oppressive socialism and ultimately would destroy personal and political liberties. *The Road to Serfdom* already was a minor cause-célèbre among a distinct minority of academic economists, and it helped entice the 36 men to assemble along the shores of Lake Geneva. The book later would be praised as one of the most influential attacks on government meddling in the marketplace.

The ideas propounded in the Hôtel du Parc discussions in 1947 were very much at odds with those of the preeminent economic theorist of the time: John Maynard Keynes. In the mid-1930s, at the same time that President Franklin Roosevelt was making trial and error decisions on how to use the government to stimulate employment and economic growth in America (along the lines advocated by the FCC), Keynes was writing from his position at Cambridge University what would become his landmark treatise, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936). During the 1940s, Keynes was the leading economic adviser to the British government and played a major role in shaping the international postwar financial system. As if that were not enough, Keynes himself happened to be a very successful capitalist. It was said that after awaking late in the morning, he would eat breakfast in bed while reviewing financial newspapers and making profitable investment decisions. (Presumably he taught at Cambridge and advised the British government
during the afternoons.) One of the Hôtel du Parc participants, Milton Friedman, later said:

It is hard at this distance to recall what the intellectual climate of opinion was immediately after World War II, in the 1940s and throughout the ’50s. It was a climate in which those of us who believed in free markets and in a socially and politically free society were a tiny, very much beleaguered minority. Collectivism—economic social, political—was very much in the ascendancy.29

There were rival theories to Keynes, including, socialism, Marxism, communism, and collectivism. It nevertheless was Keynes who then dominated academic economic thought in Europe and the North America in the 1940s.30 The meeting in Switzerland occurred slightly less than a year after Keynes’s death in April 1946. The Hôtel du Parc group came not to praise Keynes, but to bury him.

Hayek’s 1944 Road to Serfdom asserted that socialism’s failure was not simply that it was less capable of producing wealth as efficiently as was capitalism but that it was the enemy of freedom itself. He argued that personal and political freedom could exist only where there was economic freedom. By allowing socialism to creep into the economy, America had “progressively abandoned that freedom in economic affairs without which personal and political freedom has never existed in the past.”31 Economic freedom was not only the basis for political freedom, but of democracy itself.32 To be in favor of capitalism was to be in favor of personal liberty and democracy. Socialism was akin to “serfdom” (the title of his book), fascism, “slavery,” and a “Servile State.”33 Unlike these despicable doctrines, free enterprise promoted “individualism which, from elements provided by Christianity and the philosophy of classical antiquity, was first fully developed during the Renaissance and has since grown and spread into what we know as Western European civilisation.”34 The tendency of socialism, according to Hayek, was to place economic decisions in the hands of a few bureaucrats who could not possibly have enough information or wisdom to make competent decisions. As a result, the tendency in socialist systems was to implement economic decisions by force with an increasing reliance on brutality, just as had happened in Soviet Russia. Serfdom had already been reached in Russia, and the United States and Western Europe were well on their way down that road. At the time the book was published, Hayek was already widely known to be a leading opponent of Keynes, and the book was taken to be an attack on the better-known economist.

The anti-Keynesians who assembled near Lake Geneva were alarmed at the direction in which the governments in Europe and the United States were moving and particularly by efforts to promote government subsidizes for education, housing, health care, unemployment insurance, and agriculture. Hayek asserted in his opening address to the group, just as he had in his book, that such government activities were not simply misguided, economically unsound, and wasteful—all of which he firmly believed—but even more fundamentally that
they were immoral and led inevitably to “totalitarianism.” The underlying battle was not about pragmatism, efficiency, or helping the unemployed and uninsured but was an ideological struggle between the forces of freedom and the forces of totalitarianism. Just as Marx had predicted the “inevitable” collapse of the capitalist state, so Hayek predicted that totalitarianism would “inevitably” come to the West within the next 40 years if the trends were not reversed.

Towards the end of their April 1947 meeting, the group of 36 formed the “Mount Pelerin Society,” named in honor of the mountain that stood behind their hotel. (“Pelerin” in French means “pilgrim,” and the members of the society often referred to themselves as pilgrims.) Although the members adopted no formal creed at their meeting, they did, according to one of the participants, George Stigler, approve some positions that were seen as “common ground” that united them. The first was their belief “in the dignity and cherished freedom of individuals.” The second was “in the institution of private property.” During the 1940s and 1950s, these Mount Pelerin economists were seen largely as intellectual renegades in the academic community. Their support of the unpopular positions that governments should not interfere with the “invisible hand” of free and unregulated markets and that state enterprises should be privatized made them outsiders.

During the next half century, the influence of this once-small group of beleaguered believers would see a dramatic increase in the acceptance of their ideas. Within 25 years of its first meeting, three of the Pelerin Society’s founders, Friedrich von Hayek, Milton Friedman, and George Stigler, had won the Nobel Memorial Prize in economic sciences. By the time of its 50th anniversary meeting, 8 of its members had won the honor. The ideas that were dismissed in the 1940s and early 1950s moved to the forefront of economic doctrine, though they certainly have not been universally accepted. The theories behind the deregulation revolutions in England and the United States in the 1980s, associated with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and President Ronald Reagan, had their ideological origins in the Mount Pelerin school. Although a technical definition of “capitalism” may still be elusive, at the time it would be undergoing a makeover that would make it increasingly compatible with “free enterprise” and, as Friedman himself would declare in the title of his most famous book, *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), with “freedom” itself.

Two years after Hayek published his attack on socialism, and the year before the Mount Pelerin meeting in 1947, Milton Friedman, then in his mid-thirties with a new PhD in economics, joined the faculty at the University of Chicago. At that moment, Chicago’s economics department, like most others in the United States, subscribed to Keynesian doctrines and viewed his rivals as upstarts and pariahs. Friedman was, however, ready to take on the received wisdom of his day. Shortly after he arrived at the University of Chicago, he was joined by the renegade Hayek. The two men, along with Friedman’s brother-in-law, law
school professor Aaron Director, formed the core of what became known as the famous “Chicago school” of economics. Even as late as 1962, when Friedman published his now-classic *Capitalism and Freedom*, the Chicago school was in a distinct minority among professional economists. But the tide had already begun to turn in Friedman’s favor. In the same book where he observed that intellectuals in the twenties and thirties were anticapitalist, Friedman also asserted that in the 1930s, “faith in the purity and virtue of labor unions was on a par with faith in home and motherhood. Extensive legislation was enacted to favor labor unions and foster ‘fair’ labor relation.” And yet something happened. According to Friedman, by “the 1950’s, ‘labor union’ was almost a dirty word; it was no longer...automatically to be taken for granted as on the side of the angels.”39 Labor had gone from being the voice of the “working men and women of America” towards becoming an “entrenched special interest.”

In a new preface written in 2002 for the 40th anniversary of his book’s original release, Friedman announced that he had not gone far enough in the original in only one respect and that this was the single most important subject that he would have changed had he been able to do the book over again: “If there is one major change I would make, it would be to replace the dichotomy of economic freedom and political freedom with the trichotomy of economic freedom, civil freedom, and political freedom.”40 “Capitalism” was not simply an efficient way to produce wealth that could be proved by the numbers, it was integrally related to political freedoms and civil liberties generally.

Friedman contrasted rhetorically the virtuous system that he advocated with the evils of communism:

The preservation and expansion of freedom are today threatened from two directions. The one threat is obvious and clear. It is the external threat coming from the evil men in the Kremlin who promise to bury us. The other threat is far more subtle. It is the internal threat coming from men of good intentions and good will who wish to reform us. [They] are anxious to use the power of the state to achieve their ends and confident of their own ability to do so. Yet if they gained the power, they would fail to achieve their immediate aims and, in addition, would produce a collective state from which they would recoil in horror and of which they would be among the first victims...The two threats unfortunately reinforce on other.41

Thus it was a terrible idea, according to Friedman, to trust democratically elected governmental officials to make decisions about the public economy but an excellent idea to trust the self-interested, profit-motivated decisions of capitalists. True freedom and morality come from allowing people to make their own self-interested decisions in the marketplace about how much they pay workers, how they use the earth’s natural resources, and in what they wish to invest. For Friedman, writing in 1962, those who promoted state planning of the economy were in fact pushing the United States in the same direction as its worst enemies. In language that unsubtly evoked the monstrosity of the Soviet gulag, he characterized the dispute with his opponents as one where he promoted “capitalism and
freedom” versus his rivals’ government-meddling approaches that produced “victims” and from which sensible-thinking people would ultimately “recoil in horror.” The Christian utopians and socialists who were the heroes of an earlier generation were now being painted as proto-totalitarians.

Hayek’s 1944 *Road to Serfdom* and Friedman’s 1962 *Capitalism and Freedom* attacked socialism and state-managed economies not only for their perceived failings to understand the economic laws on which the modern marketplace functions, but also for the moral reason that state-managed economies subvert personal freedom. Socialism inevitably leads to serfdom while capitalism, they argued, sustains and is built on personal freedom. Economics is not simply about the efficient production of goods; it is about moral human beings living in personal freedom. The free market is not simply efficient, it is a moral force for good. However unfashionable these ideas were among elites in the 1940s and 1950s, they were later to become the conventional wisdom not only among many of the world’s leading economists, but also of major political figures of the 1970s and 1980s, including most notably Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Hayek won the Nobel Prize in economics in 1974 and Friedman won the same honor two years later.

**All in the Family: Interreligious Wars over Economics (1945–1955)**

In the fall of 1944, at exactly the same time that Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom* first appeared in bookstores, the leading conservative in the United States Senate, Robert A. Taft of Ohio—known widely as “Mr. Republican”—made the same core ideological assertion as had academic Hayek. Speaking while the United States was at war in Europe and in the Pacific, Senator Taft declared that President Roosevelt’s economic policies were not simply misguided, wasteful, and inefficient, they were in reality “state socialism” and they had not “the slightest regard for the freedom of the individual.” The senator saw two and only two stark choices for Americans in 1944: “whether we take the high road to socialism in the United States with a substantial suppression of liberty, or whether we seek a constantly higher standard of living under the American system.” Only two years after accusing one president of the United States of being a “socialist” and after labeling President Truman’s health-care proposal as “socialized medicine,” Senator Taft let fly the ultimate accusation: “Can anyone be surprised that there is some delay in enacting such a left-wing Communist proposal?” The term “socialism” was rapidly becoming synonymous with “communism” and was equally anathema to American values. Whereas in Europe “socialism” and “communism” were two of the many competitors for popular support, they had become in the United States terms of near-universal opprobrium and were used polemically as synonyms. At the time that Senator Taft labeled President Truman’s health-care proposal “left-wing Communist,” Joseph McCarthy was still a little-known circuit court judge living in Wisconsin.
“Taft” was the most prominent family name associated with the Republican Party during the first half of the twentieth century. William Howard Taft had been both the president and the chief justice of the United States. President Taft had been identified with the progressive wing of the Republican Party at the time of his election to the presidency in 1908. In the curious election of 1912, three prominent Republicans ran for the party’s nomination, each of whom was strongly identified with the progressive movement: then-President Taft, former President Theodore Roosevelt, and Republican Senator Robert M. La Follette Sr. (whose son would be defeated by Joseph McCarthy in the 1948 race for the U.S. Senate). By the 1930s, Taft’s two sons, Senator Robert A. Taft and the younger Charles P. Taft, were both well-known political figures in their own right on the national stage, though their Republican politics pushed in opposing directions. (Robert was long identified with the conservative wing of the Republican Party and was in 1952 the party’s presumed nominee for president until Dwight Eisenhower announced his own candidacy.) In 1936, the Republican Party in Ohio named conservative Robert as its “favorite son” candidate for the party’s nomination for president at the convention in Kansas City. In 1936, when Robert went to Kansas City as a conservative favorite son, his brother Charles turned up at the same convention as a campaign advisor to the leader of the party’s progressive wing, Alf Landon, who ultimate secured the nomination. Curiously, the cover of *Time* magazine’s post-convention issue featured a picture of “Landon’s Taft,” the nominee’s 38-year-old adviser, Charles, rather than the nominee himself.44

Although Charles Phelps Taft remained active in local Ohio politics throughout his life, he was better known on the national scene in the 1940s and 1950s for his association with the Federal Council of Churches, the same body in which John Foster Dulles was concurrently playing a prominent role in foreign policy issues. In 1947, the year of the founding of the Mount Pelerin Society, the FCC elected Taft to be its president. Throughout the following decade, Taft would serve as the principal spokesman for the FCC on economic justice issues just as Dulles would speak on foreign policy matters. While Senator Robert Taft had already become a red-baiter on economic issues as early as 1946, his younger brother Charles and the FCC were about to become prime targets of red-baiting by none other than their fellow Christians.45 The economic writings of Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman would be read and promoted as if they revealed how Christians should understand biblical economics.

In the middle of 1945, a year after Hayek published *The Road to Serfdom*, and in the brief interlude between Nazi Germany’s collapse and the surrender of Japan, the Reverend Carl McIntire, a Presbyterian, declared a religious war on the economic positions of the FCC. In a title that played off that of the recently published book by Hayek, McIntire’s *The Rise of the Tyrant* (1945) became what might, at least symbolically, be seen as the first sign of a postwar religious right.46 McIntire argued that the best defense against socialism and the inevitable loss of liberties it would bring would be to return to biblical teachings. McIntire
concluded that the Bible teaches “capitalism” as the economic system under which God wants man to live.

We have a general thesis. This thesis is that the Bible teaches private enterprise and the capitalistic system, not as a by-product or as some sideline, but as the very foundation structure of society itself in which men are to live and render an account of themselves to God. 47

McIntire argued that right-believing Christians had surrendered the field of economics to socialists in their midst. His own theory of economics was Bible-based capitalism. In terms that would echo later with Billy Graham’s pronouncement that “Jesus taught the value of private property,” McIntire was similarly finding in the Bible the spirit of free enterprise and capitalism as the core foundation of society that was overseen and approved by none other than God. McIntire insisted that the “true church defends the profit motive, competition, private enterprise, and the individual, on the authority of the Word of God.” McIntire believed that his Bible-based economics “may be called a new field because it has been so completely ignored in recent years.” Those who should have been supporting Bible-based capitalism and free enterprise had instead been attacking it. “Strangely, it is under attack today by the very men and groups who should be presenting to us the thesis itself. These include high leaders in many Protestant churches, some of our larger Protestant denominations, [and] the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America.” 48 Fundamentalist Christian economics had been turned on its head between Erdman’s article in The Fundamentals in 1917 and The Rise of the Tyrant in 1945.

Though the inerrant Bible had not changed between 1917 and 1945 (though new translations had appeared), its interpretation by fundamentalists was quite different. Unlike Erdman, McIntire did not evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of socialism but attacked it in unequivocal terms. While the philosophical and theological proponents of socialism and the Social Gospel had relied on terms such as “the common good” and the language of “peace” and “harmony” to advance their beliefs, McIntire’s book about the American economy did not employ the imagery of the common good but employed instead the rhetoric of war, enemies, death, and destruction.

When freedom is destroyed, whatever takes its place is tyranny. There is no substitute for freedom. Only in a free society can man be man. Private enterprise, which we cherish for America, can live only in a free economy. Destroy liberty and you kill private enterprise. Limit private enterprise and you massacre freedom. 49

Such volatile language about economics remains familiar well into the twenty-first century. These five sentences, which begin his book, were not a sober warning about problems facing the American economy but were a warning of a potential apocalypse: “America faces the greatest struggle of her existence.” This struggle was not a battle between military superpowers fighting each other to
the death. It was instead a “conflict between a free economy and the Russian idea of controlled economy.”

This battle of economic theories was not a vigorous competition to see who could produce the most goods; it was a battle unto death. The two stark choices, freedom and capitalism versus communism and a controlled economy, were a battleground in the war between good and evil.

In order to reach the conclusion that the free enterprise system is what makes political freedom and democracy possible, McIntire did not rely on standard economic analysis or political theory but on religion and the Bible. “This is primarily a religious book. The whole question of private enterprise is here examined from the viewpoint of religion and the Scriptures. It is, definitely, not a political treatise.” The motivation that propelled McIntire to write his book was not to correct some well-meaning but misinformed academic economists; rather, “it is the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.” McIntire tied together the Bible, Jesus Christ, capitalism, civil liberties, democracy, and the founding of the United States of America into a whole.

Democracy, the maintenance of private enterprise, the preservation of a free economy, and the security of our liberties—are, at bottom, religious issues. These realities came out of the abiding faith of our forefathers who believed certain things about God, about man, about the Bible. Because they believed these things they gave us the land in which we dwell, a land of liberty.

To be a true American was to accept the biblical foundation of the United States and its free-enterprise system. The “foundation stones” of the economic world were created by God. As a proof of the link between God, money, and America, McIntire insisted that “the men who made America what it is believed it; they were so obedient to its message that they wrote upon our coins, ‘In God we trust.’” All of the themes were now tied: religion, war, freedom, capitalism, coins, and the United States of America. It would be the right-understanding Americans, those who believed in the Bible, who would lead this economic war against communism.

Whereas the Social Gospelers emphasized the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus’s statements about the poor, McIntire found the biblical justification for his viewpoints, oddly enough, in the Ten Commandments. “Private enterprise is presupposed and established in the moral law; that is, in the Ten Commandments. This is the only moral law that exists, and anything that is called the moral law outside the Ten Commandments is a misnomer.” To the modern reader, McIntire’s effort to find capitalism in the Ten Commandments seems terribly strained. “It has been in the honoring and the maintenance of these Commandments that we have had our ‘God-planned’ free society.” The ultimate conclusion: “Moses was a real capitalist.” McIntire did not so much find capitalism in the Ten Commandments as written; rather, he etched in his own new eleventh commandment.

Unlike the fundamentalist Erdman, writing 50 years earlier, McIntire did not accept the proposition that good Christians may be either socialists or capitalists,
provided that they place their ultimate faith on the teachings of Christ. For him there was a stark choice between Christ and free enterprise on the one hand and socialism and evil on the other. “A fight as serious and as desperate as any waged in World War II is going on. It is a life-or-death struggle, and everyone of us must get into it quickly, or it will destroy our freedom and our children.”

The message that McIntire offered was not one of hope, peace, or optimism. He offered a dire warning that a conflict was at hand and that Christians must be prepared to do battle against their enemies if God’s will were to prevail. The enemy he identified with particularity were those Christians who interpreted the Bible from a perspective different from that of capitalism. The traitors to Christianity, the fifth column, could be found by looking no further than the Federal Council of Churches. The next dozen years would see an uncharitable assault on the FCC generally and Senator Taft’s brother Charles P. Taft (among others) specifically.

In February 1947, for the first time since 1932, the Federal Council of Churches convened a meeting to prepare a position paper on Christian values and the economy. The opening address was delivered by Charles P. Taft. In response to conservative Christians’ argument that the church should devote itself to spiritual matters and eschew politics, Taft responded that non-involvement in political life was the approach taken by the German churches during the rise of Hitler and that the consequences of such passivity were obvious. FCC President Taft urged the delegates meeting in Pittsburgh to recommend the creation of an ongoing FCC commission on economics, akin to the “Commission on a Just and Durable Peace” headed by John Foster Dulles. The delegates and later the FCC accepted this recommendation.

The document adopted in Pittsburgh, the *Report of the National Study Conference on the Church and Economic Life*, unsurprisingly took a very different approach to economics from that of the Reverend McIntire or the “pilgrims” who would gather two months later at the Hôtel du Parc in Switzerland. While neither adopting nor employing the word “socialism” (and certainly not “communism”), the Pittsburgh document of 1947 challenged directly the types of assertions that the Reverend McIntire had made about the underlying premises of a biblical economy. In what might be characterized as the most “radical” of its statements and the greatest challenge to what would later become conventional American free-enterprise wisdom, the *Report*, unlike McIntire, found that

> Property represents a trusteeship under God, and should be held subject to the needs of the community. Under Christian perspectives, no single current system of ownership universally meets this test.

Profits are characteristic of a money economy and are defensible, subject to proper methods of accumulation and distributing them... Christians must be actuated more largely by a service motive than a profit motive.

The intellectual battle, or perhaps religious war, had been joined. For McIntire, pursuit of profit was God-sanctioned. For the FCC, profits were a distraction
from the Christian teaching of giving generously to the poor. Like the libertarian Volker Fund, which subsidized the first meeting of the Mount Pelerin Society in 1947, the Rockefeller Foundation gave a grant of $100,000 (approximately $1,000,000 in 2000 dollars) in April 1949, to the “Department of the Church and Economic Life” of the FCC to conduct a multiyear study to consider the application of Christian principles to economic life.\(^{58}\) The head of the new department was, once again, none other the former president of the FCC and the brother of “Mr. Republican,” Charles P. Taft. Taft would assume responsibility for administering the large Rockefeller Foundation grant.

In that same year, 1949, the prominent journalist John T. Flynn, who once had championed Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, published his own book entitled *The Road Ahead*, which also played on the title of Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom*. Flynn, who had by now renounced his earlier support for Roosevelt’s economics, attacked the FCC’s economic doctrines in a sarcastically titled chapter called “Kingdom of God.” Flynn referred to the “Communist and Social Planners in this country” who have created “front organizations” to make their message acceptable to the American people. He solemnly assured us that when conducting his research for the book he was (almost like Captain Renault in *Casablanca*) “startled and shocked” to learn how the churches of America were being used to promote communism. Flynn declared that the FCC, the lead “front organization” for communism in America, “is by all odds the most powerful apparatus in existence for propaganda among the Christian laity of America.” Using italics to make certain that his readers did not miss the point, Flynn announced that “many of the men most powerful in directing [the FCC’s] affairs are using its machinery to promote the interests of a Socialist revolution in America.” Flynn thus repeated essentially the same accusation against Charles Taft that Robert Taft had hurled against President Truman. Flynn accused President Truman’s medical insurance plan as in fact being nothing more than “socialized medicine.”\(^{59}\)

As opposed to the communism and socialism being advocated by the FCC, Flynn declared, again using italics, that while socialism would lead to slavery, “private enterprise in a severely restrained republican government is the only one in which men can enjoy the inestimable blessings of freedom.” God-given freedom, in other words, precludes the kind of intervention that might lead to universal health care and other social reforms. Flynn, unlike some others, understood that capitalism had some flaws. But these paled in comparison to the flaws of its only serious competitor, socialism. Again in his own italics: “We must stop apologizing for our Capitalist society.” In a declaration that would echo many years later, Flynn insisted that Americans were at war with themselves about the future of their society. He called this internal American struggle a “social war.”\(^{60}\)

We are in a war—a social war—and we must understand that character of it. Our enemies have ruthlessly and, in places, savagely, carried on a campaign to get
possession of all the instruments of opinion and information. They have not captured all of them. . . Revolutionary forces have managed to lay hold of many of the instrumentalities of the classroom, the platform, the pulpit, the movies and the radio upon an amazing scale and to use them, not for their legitimate purposes of education, information and entertainment, but to carry on a concerted attack upon the minds of the American people, to mold the opinions of readers and audiences and to drive from the press, the air, the movies and the bookshops, by organized boycotts and organized smearing, all who have dared to stand up for our American way of life.  

No sooner had World War II ended America’s unified battle against enemies foreign than one part of America declared a civil war against enemies domestic. The same thing would happen 50 years later. 

In 1947, the Pews of Philadelphia were one of the richest families in America. Although their fortune rivaled those of the Rockefellers, Mellons, and the DuPonsts, their preference for privacy meant that they were far less well known to the general public. Their fortune came from Sun Oil Company (later Sunoco). The head of the family, J. Howard Pew (1882–1971) served as the president of Sun Oil—founded by his father—from 1912 until 1947. After 1947, Pew continued to serve as board chairman while also devoting his considerable energies to religious and philanthropic activities. Beginning in 1948, he and his three siblings established seven separate charities and foundations designed to promote capitalism, public service, and religion. (The different entities were later combined to form the Pew Charitable Trusts.)

Like John Foster Dulles, J. Edgar Hoover, and President Eisenhower, Pew was a Presbyterian. Although a resident of Philadelphia, he made a sizable contribution to the National Presbyterian Church when it decided to move from its original location on Connecticut Avenue (the place where Eisenhower was baptized and worshiped) to Nebraska Avenue. He and his foundations were major contributors to the conservative think tanks American Enterprise Institute, the Hoover Institution, and the Foundation for Economic Education. He provided the financial backing that helped Billy Graham and Harold Ockenga merge two leading evangelical schools into the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. After his death, Pew’s writings were collected and published in a book entitled Faith and Freedom, which, like Milton Friedman’s Capitalism and Freedom, praised American capitalism for promoting freedom but which, unlike Friedman, argued that religion was the essential to the mix. Although Pew denied having been a member of the infamous John Birch Society, he was listed on the editorial advisory board of the organization’s magazine, American Opinion, and he was a stockholder in its publication division and was a friend of its founder Robert Welsh. He also had been a financial backer of Barry Goldwater’s presidential bid in 1964. On his office wall were pictures of “two of his most admired Americans, Billy Graham, the evangelist, and former President Herbert C. Hoover.”

In 1950, the year after Flynn published The Road Ahead and a few weeks after Joseph McCarthy launched his assault on communists in the State Department, J. Howard Pew financed a new organization entitled the Christian Freedom
Foundation and underwrote its newsletter, *Christian Economics*. The newsletter’s masthead read: “We stand for free enterprise—the economic system with the least amount of government and the greatest amount of Christianity.” The editor argued that the “laws of economics” are “part of the laws of God.” The publication was mailed weekly and without charge to 175,000 Protestant clergymen throughout the country. It extolled the virtues of the free-enterprise system and linked those economic values to the Christian faith. According to its editor, “Free market capitalism permeated by Christian ideals” is what constitutes “Christian capitalism.” According to Sara Diamond, two of the most important and influential conservative religious publications to emerge from the 1950s were *Christian Economics* and Billy Graham’s *Christianity Today* (1956), the latter of which also was subsidized significantly by Pew. Both publications were stridently anticommunist and were strong promoters of free enterprise, though unlike many other conservative publications of the time *Christianity Today* took an early position in favor of racial integration that mirrored Graham’s own developing opinions.

At approximately the same time that Pew helped launch the publication of *Christian Economics* in the Spring of 1950, delegates of the mainline Federal Council of Churches, voted to reestablish the FCC as the new National Council of Churches of Christ (NCC) effective midnight on December 31, 1950. Being under budgetary constraints in 1950–1951, the FCC/NCC naturally sought financial support from wealthy donors, notably including J. Howard Pew. Although the NCC like the FCC initially was seen as the principal voice of religion in America, there were dissenters within who, like Pew, increasingly bristled at what they perceived as the leftist social and political agenda of the institution as a whole. While these conservative dissenters might have defected to the newer National Association of Evangelicals or the fundamentalist American Council of Christian Churches, they really wanted, in the words of Martin Marty, “a more militant voice in the Cold War, consistent defense of laissez-faire free enterprise economics as the sole Christian pattern, and theological conservatism to counter the liberal tendencies of the council’s leadership.” With the influence of his substantial wallet, Pew was able to obtain authorization in 1950 of a so-called “National Lay Committee” within the NCC that would offer its own analysis of the role of religion in the public square. Pew was to be its chairman.

The National Lay Committee’s concluding publication in mid-1955 appeared under a title curiously implying that it was not the committee’s report to the NCC, but J. Howard Pew’s report to the committee: *The Chairman’s Final Report to the Members of the National Lay Committee*. As Professor Marty suggests, the document offers a conservative criticism of the perceived liberal bias of the NCC on economic, social, and international matters. The document particularly takes issue with the NCC’s document *Basic Christian Principles and Assumptions for Economic Life*. Calling the NCC report “socialist,” the National Lay Committee voted unanimously against it. “It was frequently labeled a ‘Socialistic Statement’ and almost as frequently ‘Communistic.’” The
principal thrust of the conservative Lay Committee Report was that religious institutions such as the NCC have no business involving themselves in political and economic matters. Whereas Pew found religious—even Christian—justification in promoting capitalism as an economic model, he found it to be doctrinally unacceptable to see the state as a potential ally in helping the poor. The National Lay Committee report argued that secularism was the enemy and that it was wrongly pushing religious people as religious people to become involved in politics. Curiously, 25 years later, the religious conservatives of the Moral Majority would turn Pew’s argument completely on its head. While secularists would remain the constant enemy, their crime became the opposite: trying to keep religious people as religious people out of politics. While completely changing the position on the role religion should play in politics, religion’s enemy remained secularism and religion’s friend remained capitalism.

By the middle of 1955, Pew largely abandoned his efforts to pull the NCC in his direction. By the next year, however, the conservative tycoon found an outlet fully amenable to receiving his money but much more acceptable to his thought. In 1956, Pew joined with the Reverend Billy Graham and provided the financing that helped launch and later subsidize the influential mouthpiece for American evangelicals: *Christianity Today*. In 1956, *Christian Century* was widely understood to be the dominant voice of American Protestant Christianity. Within a few years it would be dwarfed by *Christianity Today*.

In the 1930s, the consensus Christian view was that morality in the marketplace was measured by the common good, and the principal voice for this viewpoint was the Federal Council of Churches. The opponents of this Christian-style economy were the capitalists, the money interests, the business tycoons, and entrenched political figures. But by the 1950s, the FCC’s successor organization, the National Council of Churches (NCC), which largely continued to express viewpoints similar to those of the FCC in the 1930s, fell under repeated and vicious assault—by other Christians—for its sympathy if not outright support of America’s most dangerous enemy at home and abroad: communism. Increasingly, the popular understanding of morality and economics was not measured by whether a policy promoted “the common good” but by the extent to which America differed from communism and socialism and the extent to which the markets were “free.” If federally funded “universal healthcare” could be successfully labeled by its opponents as “socialized medicine,” the debate was over. If a federally funded interstate public transportation system could be labeled as being “against free enterprise,” it would fail. But if a federally funded interstate highway system could be labeled as “promoting freedom,” it would become a success. Powerful support for the new “biblically based capitalism” came from the same interests that had opposed the “biblically based socialism” (those whom Jesus said were as likely to enter heaven as was a camel to pass through the eye of a needle: the wealthy).

At the time of his death in late 2006, the diminutive Milton Friedman, who stood a mere five foot two against John Maynard Keynes’s six and a half feet,
had long been a towering figure among economists. On his death, Friedman’s influence and his contributions to economics were acknowledged across the ideological landscape. The New York Times called him “the grandmaster of free-market economic theory in the postwar era and a prime force in the movement of nations toward less government and greater reliance on individual responsibility.”71 The Washington Post concluded that his “tireless advocacy of unfettered free markets reshaped the nation’s economic policies” and the newspaper named him one “of the most influential economists of the 20th century.” Noting the transformation of economics in the previous 50 years, it concluded that “laissez-faire ideas went from maverick to mainstream during his lifetime.”72 The chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, Ben Bernanke, said at the time of Friedman’s death, that his “monetary framework has been so influential that, in its broad outlines at least, it has nearly become identical with modern monetary theory.”73 The U.S. House of Representatives voted to accept a resolution describing him as “one of the world’s foremost champions of liberty, not just in economics but in all respects.”74

Milton Friedman probably had more popular influence on American politics and public discourse than any other economist of the twentieth century. His influence, and that of others in his ideological camp, brought to an end the easy rhetoric of the era of Franklin Roosevelt and John Maynard Keynes where government was portrayed as the friend of the people.75 Under the influence of Friedman and others, politicians increasingly began to make pronouncements like President Reagan’s declaration that “government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem”76 to President Clinton’s “the era of big government is over.”77 President Nixon is often cited as having once said in the 1960s “we are all Keynesians now.” Just as this quotation by a Republican president may actually have been apocryphal, so it might be imagined that Democratic President Bill Clinton in the 1990s could have said “we are all Friedmanites now.”

The beginning of this ideological and rhetorical reversal from Keynesian presumptions to “free-market” assumptions—where “capitalism” was baptized and became part of the American religion and integral American way of life—might symbolically be dated as coinciding with the founding of the Pelerin Society in 1947. This movement brought a fresh vigor into some older terms in American political rhetoric. Quasi-religious expressions like the “sanctity of private property” and the “sanctity of contract” and the “invisible hand guiding the economy” gained new currency. Economics, in this worldview, was not just a “dismal science,” as it had been labeled by Thomas Carlyle a hundred years earlier, where academics fought over econometric models, but a source of insight into the moral underpinnings of freedom and democracy. “Freedom” does not mean something like “a lack of worries about having gainful employment or health coverage,” but “governmental non-interference with the ways of the ‘invisible hand’ in the marketplace.”

During the second half of 2008, some of the largest and heretofore most powerful financial institutions in the United States collapsed: Freddie Mac,
Fannie Mae, Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, Lehman Brothers, American International Group (AIG), and others. Two years earlier the collapse of such robust institutions would have seemed impossible. During the same period, the stock market took dramatic losses and it was widely—though certainly not universally—perceived that the practice of market deregulation begun in the 1980s had contributed significantly to the catastrophe. The newspapers were filled with talk of the largest financial meltdown in the United States since the great depression of the 1930s. In late September 2008, Congress embarked on a financial rescue plan that was openly and derisively described (by many) as “socialism.” In the midst of this crisis, when the future of the American economy was more uncertain than at any point since 1929 and as the sword of Damocles seemed to dangle above, President George W. Bush addressed the American people. He acknowledged that the country had witnessed “triple-digit swings in the stock market. Major financial institutions have teetered on the edge of collapse, and some have failed. As uncertainty has grown, many banks have restricted lending.” Unlike President Hoover, who presided over the coming of the great depression but who refused to describe his economic beliefs as “capitalism,” President Bush had no such hesitancy. In his brief speech he said that despite “instances of abuse, democratic capitalism is the best system ever devised.” Though he chose not to designate either the United States Constitution or Christianity as “the best system ever devised,” he did not forget to conclude his speech with the words “May God bless you.”
Part III

Deploying America’s “Spiritual Weapons” Abroad

On November 1, 1954, the night before voters went to the polls in the midterm elections, President Eisenhower and Vice President Nixon preempted the popular television show *I Love Lucy* in order to urge the public to support Republican candidates for Congress. After apologizing for interrupting what was also one of his favorite television programs, the vice president cited several recent successes of the Eisenhower administration both at home and abroad. He noted particularly that the foreign “hot spots” of Guatemala and Vietnam had been “cooled” by the administration through “diplomacy” and “leadership.” (He said nothing about clandestine CIA activities nor secret U.S. government-led propaganda operations that had been designed to help shape public opinion in the United States.) Vice President Nixon concluded his plea to the voters by recognizing that Americans want an administration which is honest. And may I say in that connection that you can be sure that this Administration is honest. And it will remain honest just as long as President Eisenhower is President of the United States.¹

In these three sentences the vice president evoked the word “honest” three times in order to assure the American people that their leaders could be trusted—just as he had in his American Legion “Back to God” speech at the beginning of the administration in February 1953. The following chapters look into the background of the “hot spots” of Guatemala and Vietnam that had been “cooled” by an “honest” administration prior the 1954 elections.
On June 14, 1954, unmarked airplanes in the CIA’s Operation PBSUCCESS dropped leaflets over the capital city of Guatemala calling upon the people of the country to rise up and overthrow their government. At that time, classified “National Intelligence Estimates” (NIEs), which were consensus documents prepared by the U.S. intelligence community, concluded that Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman was not himself a communist and that there were few actual communists in his government or in the population generally. They also concluded that President Arbenz, who had been democratically elected, was very popular in Guatemala and that his recent reform efforts had the support of the majority of his fellow citizens. The NIEs nevertheless concluded that communists were disproportionately influential in the government and that their influence was continuing to grow, although they were unable to identify any direct Soviet influence on the country. At the same time that the classified NIEs described the complexity of the situation in Guatemala in somewhat nuanced terms, several leading American political figures and news publications did not. The American public, which did not have access to the classified analyses from the U.S. intelligence community, received instead a barrage of assertions from leading politicians and news sources ranging from the New York Times to the New York Post asserting that the Guatemalan government was “Red,” “Commie,” “Communist,” “Kremlin-controlled,” or “Communist infiltrated.” Americans who formed their opinions about Guatemala based upon statements of American politicians and the American press would have believed that Guatemala was a dangerous threat to the security interests of the United States.
Dictators and Democracies

In the early 1950s, the United States was the dominant superpower in the western hemisphere with a population of just over 150,000,000. Guatemala was then one of the poorest countries on the continent with a population of approximately 3,000,000, making it at the time roughly the same size in both land mass and population as the state of Tennessee. A comprehensive study that evaluated the relative strength of democratic governments in Latin America in the twentieth century described most of Guatemala’s neighbors in the early 1950s as being “authoritarian,” including Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. Guatemala was one of only two Central American governments considered to be “semi-democratic” at the time, the other being Costa Rica. Guatemala made its advance into the semi-democratic camp after undergoing a general strike in 1944 that forced the authoritarian regime of Jorge Ubico Castañeda (who modeled himself on Napoleon Bonaparte) to collapse. A popular coup followed and placed Juan José Arévalo in power. The new government, unlike its predecessor, was actively antifascist and refused to recognize the regimes of notorious dictators Francisco Franco of Spain, Anastasio Somoza García of Nicaragua, and Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic. For years afterwards, the events of 1944 were thought of as a popular revolution. The new government and its immediate successors liberalized reforms, held popular elections, and prodded Guatemala towards democracy. In 1951, Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, a left-leaning former military officer who had participated in the popular 1944 coup was elected by almost 60 percent of the popular vote. Arbenz commanded strong support among the peasants, the working class, and the army, as U.S. intelligence officials acknowledged in its contemporaneous classified analyses.

Guatemala’s 1952 Agrarian Law

At one o’clock in the morning of June 17, 1952, the democratically elected Guatemalan legislature voted in favor of a land-reform law that was designed to decrease the extent of what it considered to be “feudal property” holdings in the country. Guatemala had heretofore perhaps the least equitable distribution of land between rich and poor of all the countries in Latin America. President Arbenz used all of the powers of his presidency to pressure the legislature to adopt the bill that he signed into law only a few hours later. The law, known as Decree 900, was the signature act of his government and it was the most significant attempt at land reform in Guatemala’s history. The law provided for the expropriation only of uncultivated agricultural lands in large estates that were more than 672 acres in size. Estates smaller than 224 acres would not be touched by Decree 900, regardless of whether they were under cultivation or not. The expropriated land was to be made available in small plots for individuals to lease and to raise food.

Sovereign states have the recognized right to expropriate land. The U.S. government and each of the 50 states regularly make use of this power for a
variety of purposes, whether to construct hospitals, build roads, or set aside land for parks or government buildings. Under generally recognized international law, when states seize land belonging to individuals they typically are seen as having the obligation to provide adequate compensation. In order to provide adequate compensation to the owners of the expropriated lands, which was required under international law, Decree 900 provided a clever way to calculate the land’s worth: property holders would be compensated for their expropriated lands at the same amount that they had declared the land’s worth to be at the time of the previous year’s tax assessment. If the landholders accurately reported the value of their land when it was a matter of paying their property taxes, then they would be fully compensated. But if they understated the land’s worth in order to reduce their tax liability, then they stood to lose a significant amount of money. It so happened that the largest foreign landholder in Guatemala at the time, the United Fruit Company, had understated the worth of its uncultivated land by approximately one-twentieth, and it stood to lose a great deal of money as a consequence of its previous tax-evading actions. Neither the United Fruit Company nor the U.S. government was amused by the clever property evaluation provision of Decree 900 that required those who lied about taxes to suffer the consequences of their earlier deceptions. They responded instead that it was unconscionable on the part of the Guatemalan government to pay the owners exactly what they had declared their land to be worth. Other than the large property holders, the land redistribution law was well received by a majority of Guatemalans who were aware of it as were the peasants of Guatemala who were in desperate need of land for cultivating food crops. Many international experts also approved of the law, including analysts within the U.S. State Department and foreign aid officials who found it “constructive and democratic in its aims.”

While much of the initial reaction to the agrarian law was positive, the law would shortly play a significant role in the ideological battle about the dangers of international communism. The United Fruit Company had been opposing what became Decree 900 from the time that it had first emerged as an idea in 1951. “United Fruit executives,” according to the CIA’s internal history, “regarded any trespass on the prerogatives they enjoyed under [the earlier authoritarian government of] Ubico as an assault on free enterprise.” And they did not hesitate to take their concerns about the assault on free enterprise to their many contacts in the U.S. government. The internal CIA history reports that even under the Truman administration, the State Department placed the Embassy at the service of the [United Fruit] company. “If the Guatemalans want to handle a Guatemalan company roughly that is none of our business,” the first secretary [at the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala] explained, “but if they handle an American company roughly it is our business.” When Embassy pressure proved insufficient, the company found lobbyists who could take its case to the Truman administration. Edward L. Bernays, the “father of modern public relations,” directed a campaign to persuade Congress and administration
officials that attacks on the company were proof of Communist complicity. “Whenever you read ‘United Fruit’ in Communist propaganda,”...you may substitute “United States.”

Ultimately, the agrarian law became Exhibit A for Americans who wished to prove that the Guatemalan government was “communist infiltrated,” a danger to “American interests,” and exporting dangerous economic theories that undermined its neighbors. The enactment of the 1952 agrarian law would be identified as one of the principal arguments inside the U.S. government in support of the plan to overthrow the Arbenz government.

Curiously, the Americans who condemned the “communist-supported” land redistribution of the Arbenz government seem not to have noticed its striking similarities to a decree that the United States itself had unilaterally imposed on Japan barely six and one-half years earlier. In December 1945, General Douglas P. MacArthur issued a land-expropriation measure identified as Directive 411:

1. In order that the Imperial Japanese Government shall remove economic obstacles to the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies, establish respect for the dignity of man, and destroy the economic bondage which has enslaved the Japanese farmer for centuries of feudal oppression, the Japanese Imperial Government is directed to take measure to insure that those who till the soil of Japan shall have a more equal opportunity to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

2. The purpose of this order is to exterminate those pernicious ills which have long blighted the agrarian structure of a land where almost half the total population is engaged in husbandry....

Directive 411 ordered the Japanese government to submit plans for the: (a) “transfer of land ownership from absentee land owners to land operators” and (b) “purchase of farm lands from non-operating owners at equitable rates.” According to MacArthur’s biographer, “the land-reform program [was] probably his greatest achievement in Japan [and it] eliminated the chief source of peasant discontent.” The general himself described it as “extraordinarily successful.” The land-reform law, as finally adopted by the Japanese Diet a year later, ultimately offered less compensation for the expropriated lands than did Guatemala’s agrarian law that Americans would later denounce for its unfairness. In Japan, “each acre went for the equivalent of a black-market carton of cigarettes. Then tenants were invited to purchase the land at the same rate. The sum could be repaid over a thirty-year period at 3.2 percent interest.” The “communist-inspired” Guatemalan Decree 900 was generous to property holders by comparison to General Douglas MacArthur’s Directive 411.

In Japan in 1945, the American ideal of democracy required that large “feudal” estates be broken up and that the land be redistributed to the people with minimal compensation to landholders. Yet in Guatemala, only a few years later, the American ideal of democracy required the toppling of a democratically
elected government that was trying to place uncultivated lands into the hands of those who were prepared to till the soil.

The Dictator and the President

On the same day in 1952 that the Guatemalan legislature adopted its new land-reform law, June 17, President Arbenz’s most vociferous opponent in Central America—the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza—happened to be in New York City. Although Somoza bristled when the American press referred to him as a “dictator,” he nevertheless had good reasons for liking the United States. As a young man Somoza studied business in Philadelphia, and while there he met his future wife, the heiress of a large fortune. Their son, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1946, the alma mater of American military heroes President Eisenhower and General MacArthur. Somoza also welcomed the military and financial support that the American government gave him during his 20-year autocratic rule of Nicaragua. Through a combination of his wife’s original fortune, the receipt of bribes, and from other forms of corruption, Somoza had been able to amass a large fortune while effectively destroying domestic political opposition. Four days after Guatemala adopted its new agrarian law, New York City’s mayor awarded the visiting dictator a “medal of honor” and a “scroll for distinguished public service.” In honor of his visit to the United States, the U.S. Congress authorized $4,000,000 for the completion of a 200-mile road linking the east and west coasts of Nicaragua—a sum that Somoza might well have paid out of his own personal fortune.

The CIA’s now-declassified history of Operation PBSUCCESS in Guatemala describes Somoza’s conversations with American officials in Washington a few weeks earlier.

In April 1952, State Department officials welcomed Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza to Washington on his first state visit. American officials had regarded Somoza as a pariah through the 1940s, but now the dictator received a state dinner and was escorted to the meeting by Maj. Gen. Harry Vaughan, Truman’s personal military adviser. Somoza’s purpose in visiting the United States was not limited to burnishing his image in the American press. He wanted to enlist the U.S. government to help him overthrow his troublesome land-reforming neighbor to the north. He specifically requested that the United States provide weapons and training to support Guatemalan exile Carlos Castillo Armas, a retired colonel, who could rally forces and overthrow the government. According to the CIA’s internal history, “Somoza told State Department officials that, if they provided arms, he and Castillo Armas would eliminate Arbenz. At Vaughan’s urging, Truman instructed [the head of the CIA, Walter Bedell] Smith to follow up.” The decision to overthrow the government of Guatemala was a clear violation of the commitments the United States made to the international community.
One of Somoza’s last publicized events on his very successful visit to the United States, where he received money, awards, and a promise to help remove the government of Guatemala, was his attendance at Sunday mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City. Bishop Joseph Francis Flannelly preached in the sermon that “there could be no peace without God.” At the end of the service, the bishop and the dictator were photographed standing together at “the cathedral doors as the organist played the Nicaraguan and American national anthems.”

Church and Estates in Guatemala

Guatemala’s Archbishop Mariano Rossell y Arellano was “a prelate whose picture was often taken with Guatemalan Fascists in the years shortly after he became archbishop in 1939.” Although Rossell Arellano was firmly anticommunist, he also had made statements praising “social and redistributive justice.” The church to which he devoted his life, however, had not yet experienced the transforming effect of either the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) or the birth of Liberation Theology that would follow the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellín in 1968.

Led by Archbishop Mariano Rossell y Arellano, this was a deeply conservative church, whose model of political democracy and social justice was Franco’s Spain. Deprived of its property in the 1870s, the church had achieved a comfortable modus vivendi with [the authoritarian dictator] Ubico, who had eased some of the restrictions to which it had been subjected. The 1945 constitution had further improved the Church’s position, but it had not gone far enough in the eyes of Rossell y Arellano and his clergy. Therefore, the Church began its feud with the revolution.

Although the Catholic Church remained an influential institution in the country, particularly among the comparatively wealthy Spanish-speakers, it remained one of the weakest in Latin America. As far back as the nineteenth century the church had suffered the consequences of anticlericalism both through laws that had restricted church activities and that had seized church lands.

When Arbenz was elected president in 1951, the most important economic influence in Guatemala was the class of owners of the large agricultural estates. The two dominant exports of Guatemala, on which the struggling economy largely depended, were coffee (the largest export) and bananas. The Guatemalans who owned large estates were mostly ladinos, the Spanish-speaking and mixed-race descendants of Spaniards and Native Americans. The land-owning ladinos in turn employed poor and landless peasants who were descendants of the Native American peoples (alternatively described as “Mayan” and “Indian”) who had been conquered by the original conquistadors and who spoke one of the more than 50 different Mayan languages and dialects. The principal cleavage in society was along mutually reinforcing racial, linguistic, and economic lines. While the religious divisions were less precise, the Mayan population was more likely to mix Catholicism with indigenous religious practices while the ladinos
were more likely to be “orthodox” Catholics. With some important exceptions, the clergy in Guatemala—reflecting class and ethnic divisions—spoke Spanish rather than the native languages and naturally would have been more at ease with those coming from the same social strata. The largest landowner in Guatemala, however, was not a ladino family but the American-based United Fruit Company, which also relied on the Mayan peasants to harvest its banana crops.

A close observer of Guatemala in the 1940s, Professor Mary Holleran, who spent several years conducting field research in the country, published a study in 1949 untainted by knowledge of the dramatic events that would occur during the following five years. Holleran observed that the larger part of the population, Mayan peasants living outside the cities, practiced a religion that could best be described as “Roman Catholicism mixed with old Mayan beliefs and rites.” In her firsthand observations of rural culture in the late 1940s, Holleran reported that for “an Indian, there is no inconsistency in accepting the Christian God on the one hand, and continuing his Mayan rites on the other.” In fact, to “much of what the official church says the Indian is apparently indifferent” and the “official church with its orthodox teachings and regulations apparently has little or no effect on the Indians.” It was difficult for the Catholic clergy to make inroads in this population that largely spoke another language and that had traditions and beliefs quite different from the Catholicism of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe. “There is no common ground on which the Spanish Bishop and his congregation of Indians, with an occasional ladino, may meet.”

There were few Catholic priests in the country, and most were not native Guatemalans and their principal language was Spanish rather than one of the Mayan languages. The church hierarchy understandably focused its attention on the relatively wealthier richer Spanish-speaking population of the cities, though there were individual examples of poor and devout clergy living in rural areas who ministered to peasants. The church’s weakness in the 1950s could not be attributed to hostility by the (relatively) leftist governments that had been in power since 1944, as was evidenced by the number of priests that had modestly increased after 1944 and by the freedom of the church to practice after the revolution.

According to Professor Holleran’s study, published in 1949, the Catholic Church in Guatemala had traditionally identified itself in opposition to its enemies, whether real or perceived. Earlier in the century the principal enemy had been anticlerical politicians. By the 1940s, the new enemy had become the communists who played “the role of the devil.” Already in the 1940s, the church broadly labeled influences that it did not like as being “communist,” regardless of whether the unwanted influence actually had anything to do with communism. True to form, when the new agrarian law was adopted in 1952, it was immediately labeled as “communist” by Archbishop Rossell Arellano and the ladino clergy who opposed it just as Professor Holleran might well have predicted.

The new agrarian law (Decree 900) pushed the conservative clergy closer to their wealthy patrons and further away from both the Mayan peasants and
political leftists who were the traditional opponents of the church. The Catholic clergy was not a reluctant participant in this battle, and it did not hesitate to characterize it as one between good and evil. The church displayed “relentless hostility” to the law and to communism.\textsuperscript{28} It “lent a veneer of legitimacy to the invectives of the upper class.”\textsuperscript{29} In the words of one of the closest observers of Guatemala, the church “preached more charity from the rich and more humility from the poor.”\textsuperscript{30} Priests were sent into the countryside to “resist a communist law that would bring them material and spiritual ruin.”\textsuperscript{31} The Catholic press in Guatemala “assailed” the government “fiercely.”\textsuperscript{32}

Two of the leading clerical opponents of the new law were Archbishop Rossell Arellano and an immigrant priest from the United States improbably named Sebastian Buccellato. The archbishop ultimately became the “prime mover” behind the establishment of an anticommunist political party. Following the enactment of the agrarian law in 1952, he sent one of the most revered religious icons in Guatemala, the crucifix of the Cristo Negro of Esquipulas, on a pilgrimage through Guatemala to counter the land-reform “devil” who “was stalking the countryside” and destroying the church.\textsuperscript{33} “The clergy, from bishop to village priest, rallied behind Rossell y Arellano.”\textsuperscript{34} Father Buccellato was not a man to mince words, and he did not hesitate to let his fellow citizens in the United States know that the so-called land reform in Guatemala was inspired by communism. After returning to the United States, he wrote that Decree 900 was a ruthless political tool that accomplished a bloodless Red revolution. . . . I viewed the whole diabolical scheme with horror. . . . Those parish members who were offered land . . . asked my opinion. Naturally I told them that communism and Christianity are irreconcilable. . . . But with the help of 35 lay catechists, who toured the countryside, most of the members [of the church] remained true and turned down the Communist offer. . . . I left the country by plane of February 3, but not until I had broadcast the truth to the people over the anti-Communist radio in Guatemala City.\textsuperscript{35}

For the clergy in Guatemala, the moral values of the Catholic Church were closely aligned not with the poor but with the economic interests of the largest landholders, including the foreign United Fruit Company. Church and estates favored the elites.

The overriding motivation of the men who led the opposition . . . was the implacable defense of privilege.

Waving the banner of anticommunism, these men engaged in a relentless campaign of opposition. . . . They sought to raise the specter of Armageddon among a people largely lacking political sophistication. Posing as champions of a Catholic faith threatened by Red hordes, they strove to inflame religious passions, and they received the full backing of the Church.\textsuperscript{36}

The CIA and the American government in turn aligned themselves with the church and the landed elites in opposition to the “communist-inspired” land reform.
CIA Operation PBSUCCESS

Objectives:

1. To remove covertly, and without bloodshed if possible, the menace of the present Communist-controlled government of Guatemala.
2. To install and sustain, covertly, a pro-US government in Guatemala.

—Memorandum, Operation PBSUCCESS
November 12, 1953

The idea behind Somoza’s April 1952 proposal to overthrow the Guatemalan government originated a few months earlier during a conversation between Somoza and a representative of the United Fruit Company. Somoza’s proposal was to launch the coup from Honduras, sandwiched between Guatemala and Nicaragua, with the American company providing part of the financial support for the operation. The president of Honduras, the country in which the training camps would be built and from where the invasion would be launched, was Juan Manuel Gálvez, a former United Fruit Company lawyer who remained sympathetic to his former client’s interests. The CIA’s deputy director in 1952 (and soon to become the director) was Allen Dulles. Dulles had been an attorney at New York’s legendary Sullivan & Cromwell law firm, which happened to be United Fruit’s law firm in the United States. The former managing director of Sullivan & Cromwell was Allen’s brother, John Foster Dulles, who also headed Sullivan’s international business practice. Allen Dulles had not only been an attorney at United Fruit’s law firm, he also had served on the company’s board of trustees. Thomas Dudley Cabot, the State Department’s director of internal security affairs in 1952 and a wealthy member of the famous Boston family, had served for many years as a director of United Fruit and had briefly been its president. (United Fruit’s first offices were in Boston.) In Washington, D.C. the company was represented by the first of the powerful and famous Washington lobbyists, Thomas (“Tommy the Cork”) Corcoran, who had close personal ties to officials in both the Roosevelt and Truman administrations.

United Fruit’s close ties to government officials during the Truman administration would soon be surpassed in Eisenhower’s. Allen Dulles became the director of Central Intelligence, and his older brother became the secretary of state. John Foster Dulles appointed John Moors Cabot, the brother of former United Fruit President Thomas Cabot, to be the assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, whose responsibilities of course included Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Assistant Secretary Cabot, like his brother, was a very rich man, and a significant portion of his wealth had come from his investments in United Fruit Company stock. The husband of President Eisenhower’s personal secretary, Ann Whitman, also happened to be the director of public relations for United Fruit. Ed Whitman produced a film whose title might be entirely laughable under other circumstances: Why the Kremlin Hates Bananas.
The “documentary” depicted United Fruit Company as a gallant soldier in the Cold War. Walter Bedell Smith, the CIA’s head during the Truman administration (and Allen Dulles’s former supervisor) was transferred by incoming President Eisenhower to the State Department where he would report directly to John Foster Dulles. Smith disliked working for the elder Dulles and soon left the State Department. Smith was elected to the board of directors of the United Fruit Company less than a year after the Arbenz government was overthrown.39
Regardless of whether this banana web in the U.S. government was unseemly, it was seamless.40

Components of PBSUCCESS

The first two CIA plans to topple the Arbenz government following the expropriation of United Fruit Land and Somoza’s trip to the United States had been planned for November 1952 and then April 1953.41 When the first two attempts failed to materialize, the CIA returned to the drawing board and developed a third plan codenamed Operation PBSUCCESS.

In 1953 and 1954, American intelligence reports concluded that the Guatemalan military was simultaneously the strongest institution in the country, decidedly anticommunist, but at the same time loyal to President Arbenz. The U.S. National Intelligence Estimates for Guatemala maintained that the Guatemalan army would “never” let the country fall to communism and at the same time it would oppose a coup attempt by someone like Castillo. Political officials in the United States reached a conclusion that the Guatemalan military had not: that the country already had effectively succumbed to communism. Because it was understood that the Guatemalan military was sufficiently loyal to Arbenz and sufficiently strong to defeat Castillo Armas, CIA planning from the beginning recognized that propaganda targeted at both the people of Guatemala and at the military would be a necessary component of Operation PBSUCCESS. Americans believed that Castillo and his U.S.-backed rebels were not capable of defeating the army by themselves, and so it would be necessary for the CIA to convince the Guatemalan military—through propaganda tactics—to overthrow its own commander-in-chief.

From its inception, PBSUCCESS was based on one premise: only the Guatemalan army could overthrow Arbenz. Psychological warfare would be the CIA’s main weapon to convince the Guatemalan officers that their security and well-being were at stake, and thus prod them toward treason.42

Each of the CIA’s three plots, beginning with the one first proposed by Somoza, identified Carlos Castillo Armas as the leader of the coup. Castillo Armas, a former colonel in the Guatemalan army, had been living in exile in Honduras since making his first failed coup attempt against Arbenz’s predecessor in 1951. Among the reasons that the United States selected the colonel who had been in exile for three years to lead the coup was that the American military
had been acquainted with him from the time he had received his training at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Armas also was a favorite of Catholic Archbishop Rosselly Arellano.43 Although American officials were never overly impressed by Castillo’s executive capabilities, they were unable to identify any better person to lead the exiles. According to the CIA’s internal history, “Castillo Armas’s organization, ‘a group of revolutionary activists, numbering a few hundred, led by an exiled Guatemalan army officer, and located in Honduras,’ remained the Agency’s principal operational asset.”44 While he may have been the best available, internal CIA records give little reason to have confidence in him as a man capable of overthrowing a popularly elected president. Damning Castillo with faint praise, his mentors described the leader of the CIA-planned coup and future president of Guatemala as having an “above average” military record, though he suffered from a “lack of combat experience.”45

In order to buttress the fledgling Castillo, the CIA propaganda campaign made use of the tools of “psychological warfare” and “black operations” ("psywar" and “black ops” in intelligence lingo). The propaganda campaign would be used to turn popular opinion against the government through the planting of false stories and creating fear in the population while the black ops would disguise the real source of the information. The CIA’s memorandum describes the planned covert Psywar activities and black operations using contacts within the press, radio, church, army and other organized elements susceptible to rumor, pamphleteering, poster campaigns and other subversive action. . . . It will be necessary to strengthen the CIA field station in Guatemala forthwith in order to supervise the launching of a sustained Psywar program and verify the capabilities of the [CIA’s] clandestine organization in Guatemala City and elsewhere.46

Thus the CIA used the Catholic Church and the media to engage in “subversive action” and promote “rumors.” An additional component of the black ops included radio broadcasts disguised to appear as if they were spontaneous outcries from disaffected Guatemalans inside the country whereas in fact they originated at a CIA facility housed at Opa Locka Air Base in Florida with transmitters located in Honduras. Weeks before the actual sabotage and invasion began in June 1954, the CIA propaganda machine softened up the population by reporting stories, both true and false, about the evils of their government. After the invasion began on June 17, the broadcasts included false but credible-sounding reports about the military successes of Castillo Armas and how the invading troops were being joined by soldiers and welcomed as liberators by a grateful and enthusiastic population. Those who trusted the radio broadcasts would have a false understanding of what was actually going on in Guatemala in June 1954.47

Using the Catholic Church in PsyWar and Black Ops

From the beginning of the first coup planning in 1952, the CIA was already interested in enlisting the Catholic Church to promote regime change in
Guatemala. In a memorandum written in December 1952—the same month that President-elect Eisenhower observed that “Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is”—a CIA officer reported that the agency had already arranged to get its message delivered inside Catholic churches.

We have arranged with the Archbishop of Guatemala for a series of special Masses covering an 8 day period in which the clergy will outline the dangers of communism to Guatemala and ask that the people resist and fight these dangers. In most of the churches throughout Guatemala the women have formed committees to aid in this campaign. What we hope to do through this program is to bring the people to a high emotional pitch. What the Archbishop does not know is that we intend to tie this 8 day campaign to our D-day. He is unaware of our military plans.48

The September 1953 PBSUCCESS planning memorandum similarly identified CIA plans to deploy contacts inside the Catholic Church as part of its psywar campaign to overthrow the Arbenz government. On April 9, 1954, Archbishop Mariano Rossell y Arellano issued a pastoral letter saying:

We raise our voice to alert Catholics at this moment when the worst atheistic doctrine of all time—anti-Christian Communism—continues its brazen inroads in our country, masquerading as a movement of social reform for the needy classes. . . . Our frontiers are opened wide to a rabble of foreign adventurers trained in the tactics of international Communism. In violations of the laws of the land, ample freedom is given them. From the official radio stations are heard the incessant preaching of social disruption and the broadcasting of the teachings of the Soviet Politburo. Newsstands are flooded with Communist literature.

The people of Guatemala must rise as one man against this enemy. Our struggle against Communism must be . . . a crusade of prayer and sacrifice, as well as intensive spreading of the social doctrine of the church and a total rejection of Communist propaganda—for the love of God and Guatemala.49

CIA operatives distributed thousands of copies throughout Guatemala.50 Internal CIA documents disclose that this letter was thought to have been particularly valuable in the propaganda campaign.51 Back in the United States, Time magazine translated and published part of the letter in its April 26, 1954 issue to show Americans that the religious leader of Guatemala was taking a heroic stand against Arbenz and communism, but without disclosing any CIA connection to it. However effective this letter may have been, there is evidence that suggests it did not flow from the pen of the archbishop himself or even from his fellow clergymen in Guatemala, but through the efforts of CIA officers working in coordination with Catholic Church officials in the United States, including possibly Cardinal Spellman. As the time of the 1954 coup neared, Spellman was apparently contacted by the CIA and urged to make contact with Rossell Arellano. Shortly thereafter, the archbishop issued a pastoral letter that certainly repeated longstanding Spellman themes.52
Regardless whether Cardinal Spellman actually was involved in drafting the letter, CIA officials recommended that it be distributed both in the United States and elsewhere to help enlist Catholic opposition to Arbenz. (A partially declassified CIA cable dated April 28, 1954 is included in Appendix III.) The April 28 CIA cable is a remarkable Cold War document not because of any dramatic action that it proposes but because it reveals that the CIA interpreted its mission as, in part, enlisting the support of religious figures in both the United States and elsewhere to further the foreign policy goals of the United States. According to the cable, the CIA should be urging Catholics to engage in

Prayer, assistance for endangered faithful in [Guatemala], defense of their Catholic schools, youth activities, other church assets [and in warning the] Faithful to avoid spiritual contamination from Commie-controlled [Guatemalan] government agencies, fronts, propaganda media.

Government officials were not seeking the church’s religious guidance; they were using religion to advance American political and economic interests. At the same time that American governmental officials were encouraging Americans to pray to preserve their government from foreign aggressors, CIA officers were encouraging Catholic leaders to convince their parishioners to pray that their government might be overthrown. After military action had begun in mid-June, the CIA then promoted the false story that under Arbenz “there will no longer [be] any religious instruction at state expense, but on the contrary lessons in atheism, Soviet style.” This assertion, of course, was the invention of a CIA officer in a political campaign that had nothing to do with reality. Apparently there was nothing inappropriate or immoral in enlisting the church and prayers in a crusade to spread lies, falsehoods, and disinformation about atheists and communists.

Politicians, Press, and Propaganda

There is no question that the leaders of Guatemala are taking orders from Soviet Russia.

—Representative Patrick Hillings
June 14, 1954

Communism has established a strong beachhead in Guatemala.

—Senator Alexander Wiley, Chairman
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
October 17, 1953

U.S. government officials did not limit themselves to conducting a propaganda campaign in Guatemala. As already shown in Chapter 1, Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles requested New York Times publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger to remove Sydney Gruson from Guatemala, and the CIA clandestinely drafted at least one article to appear unattributed in Time magazine. The CIA and the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) “helped to write and disseminate
articles attacking the Arbenz regime.” According to a declassified document prepared by the U.S. Information Agency, its “principal information effort was directed toward creating greater awareness throughout the Hemisphere of the real threat to peace and security posed by the verifiable communist penetration of the Guatemalan government.” This involved “preparation and placement of stories labeling certain Guatemalan officials as communists, and also labeling certain actions of the Guatemalan government as communist-inspired.” In late 1953, “media and field operations were directed to intensify their efforts in the collection, preparation, and placement of materials demonstrating communist design on, and penetration of, the Hemisphere.”

In March 1954, Secretary of State Dulles personally traveled to Caracas, Venezuela, to attend the Tenth Inter-American Conference. Dulles helped persuade the delegates to adopt a resolution to condemn communism in the Americas, which was adopted on March 28. At the same time that it was denouncing communist interference in the hemisphere, the U.S. government was secretly “using all available resources, to expose and discredit the Arbenz regime as communist-dominated.” As the events heated up in the month before the coup, the USIA moved from a “largely unattributed effort to an aggressive labeling campaign, more than 200 articles, backgrounders, and scripts were prepared and transmitted . . . for press and radio placement abroad.” As the revolt began, USIA employed “well-organized mailing lists” to send “pamphlets and posters” to targeted individuals and groups. During this period—when Cuba was ruled by dictator Fulgencio Batista—the CIA took advantage of the political climate and used the island as a base for publishing and distributing throughout Latin America 100,000 copies of a pamphlet entitled “Chronology of Communism in Guatemala.” A radio station in Cuba “agreed to use all hard-hitting commentaries on Guatemala at peak listening hours, without USIS attribution.”

As early as October 1953, “U.S. officials began a sustained campaign of public denunciations of the Arbenz administration.” Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Cabot (the former United Fruit executive) attacked Guatemalan authorities for “openly playing the Communist game.” When the Guatemalan government captured written evidence of the American-planned PBSUCCESS and published the documents in January 1954, the USIA sprang into action and encouraged the American press to “imply arrests made arbitrarily and form part of campaign to intimidate anti-Communist opposition to Communist-influenced Arbenz administration.” Not only did the U.S. government foist dozens of small lies, it uttered the big lie in response to Arbenz’s completely accurate assertion that there was an ongoing American plot to overthrow him. The State Department calmly, but falsely, announced to the American people that “it is the policy of the United States not to intervene in the internal affairs of other nations.” The American press accepted the official lie. “Every American publication within the liberal-conservative arc blithely dismissed the charge that the United States was plotting against Arbenz.” Lies and prayers had become basic tools of American foreign policy.
The American press accepted and repeated the assertions that the “Guatemalan government is communist controlled” and often that Guatemala was “directed by Moscow.” The CIA’s internal history concluded that American

Newspaper and broadcast media, for example, accepted the official view of the Communist nature of the Guatemalan regime. In the spring of 1954, NBC News aired a television documentary “Red Rule in Guatemala,” revealing the threat the Arbenz regime posed to the Panama Canal. Articles in Reader’s Digest, the Chicago Tribune, and the Saturday Evening Post drew a frightening picture of the danger in America’s backyard.62

Publications ranging from Time magazine to the New York Times repeatedly made such claims. The weekly magazine characterized a March 1954 statement by Arbenz as being the “most forthright pro-Communist declaration the President has ever uttered.”63 It repeatedly referred to the “pro-Communist government of President Jacobo Arbenz”64 and to the “Communist-infiltrated Guatemala” that it insinuated, without offering any evidence, was closely linked to Moscow.65 Not only was the government “communist coddling,” it was also a “capitalist-baiting left-wing regime.”66 The government was accused of torturing prisoners “for no apparent reason except that they...were members of anti-Communist organizations.”67 The title of an article published in June 1954 was “The Problem is Communism.”68 Even the more staid Council on Foreign Relations got into the act. “The Guatemalan situation is quite simply the penetration of Central America by a frankly Russian-dominated Communist group.”69

The tiny coffee- and banana-growing republic of Guatemala with its miniscule army was characterized by the New York Times as a “threat to American security.”70 What Americans seemed not to have noticed, however, was that despite the overwhelming number of characterizations of Guatemala as “communist-controlled,” “Kremlin-directed,” and a threat to American security, there were no allegations that Guatemala was arming rebels in other countries, plotting coups in other countries, or building an outsized military. The “threat” from Guatemala was not identified in any military or armed danger it posed to anyone. Without any allegations, let alone proof, that Guatemala was posing a military threat, Americans were led to believe that their government had been extremely patient in the face of unprincipled behavior that threatened American economic and security interests. “In the United States, ignorance, anticommunism, and self-righteousness blended seamlessly to generate the comforting conviction in the political and intellectual elites, in the press, in the Congress, and in the public at large that Guatemala was the aggressor and the United States was the long-suffering victim.”71

Collapse and Congratulations

The government of President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman collapsed on June 27, 1954, 10 days after the beginning of the invasion. As recounted in the CIA’s
internal history of Operation PBSUCCESS, which was written in 1997, agency officials initially took credit for having orchestrated his collapse and many believed it to be one of their greatest early successes in the Cold War. It was initially seen by the CIA as a “triumph” and a matter for “jubilation.” Agency officials were particularly proud that they had overthrown a Soviet-backed government with relatively little cost in armaments and lives lost, but with skillful manipulation of Guatemalan public opinion through propaganda. In reality the CIA-backed invaders had performed extremely poorly in combat and the government collapsed as a result of several missteps and unplanned actions. Ultimately, the CIA had been very lucky. PBSUCCESS had not been well-planned or well-executed.

But in their subsequent briefing to President Eisenhower, CIA officers described less what actually happened and offered instead their idealized version of what they wanted to believe had happened, including the remarkable success of the propaganda operation. Although the greater part of the briefing may not consciously have been intended to mislead the president, one officer did lie when answering the question of how many CIA-backed rebels had been killed. The knowingly false answer was “only one.” Eisenhower’s one-word response—“incredible”—was more accurate than he realized.

The CIA therefore gave the president an exaggerated impression about the capabilities and effectiveness of the agency and its clandestine operation. The distorted success story became part of the CIA’s own internal legend that was subsequently assumed to be true, not only within the agency itself but by others in government who gradually came to hear the version that had first been reported to President Eisenhower. As the role of the CIA behind the coup increasingly became a matter of public knowledge by the early 1960s, it was widely believed by Americans to be a success story and an illustration of the CIA’s competence. As Time magazine reported early in 1961, with a tip of the hat rather than in dismay, “despite expected denials, CIA was chiefly responsible for toppling Jacobo Arbenz’ Red regime in Guatemala in 1954, and privately takes credit for it.” According to the CIA’s internal history, the “triumph showed what could be accomplished through covert action, and its lessons, learned and unlearned, would have ramifications for years to come.”

U.S. presidents in the 1960s and 1970s believed that the CIA’s skilled work in bringing about the 1954 coup was an impressive example of how the United States effectively could use the clandestine agency and propaganda to subvert its communist foes. “Eisenhower’s policymakers drew confidence from the belief that covert action could be used as a convenient, decisive final resort.” It was this belief that gave Eisenhower and others a misguided confidence about the effectiveness of clandestine actions, which immediately would be launched in Vietnam in support of Ngo Dinh Diem. Years later, after the CIA undertook an investigation into its own history and records, PBSUCCESS increasingly was recognized to have been a failure with regard to planning, execution, and consequences.
But in July 1954, years before the clandestine role of the CIA was acknowledged and decades before its records would become public, the overthrow of the Guatemalan government was explained to Americans as having been a diplomatic triumph for the United States. Freelance reporter Flora Lewis—the wife of the New York Times reporter Sydney Gruson who had been the object of Frank Wisner’s ire a month earlier—wrote a flattering article about U.S. Ambassador John Peurifoy, describing his diplomatic work during the coup in Guatemala as his “latest and most stunning success.”80 Time magazine saw the coup as “one solid, significant triumph for U.S. and inter-American diplomacy: the ouster of the Communist-dominated government in Guatemala.”81 In his election-eve statement on nationwide television that thrice praised the Eisenhower administration’s “honesty,” Vice President Nixon described the foreign policy triumph in Guatemala as having been the result of “diplomacy” and “leadership.”82

During the 1950s and 1960s, most Americans who knew something about PBSUCCESS thought of it as an early and impressive American triumph in the Cold War. With relatively little cost, it was believed, the CIA had ousted a communist-infiltrated government directed by Moscow and installed a new government that was much more favorable to American economic and security interests. But in the 1980s and 1990s, as CIA records began to be declassified and as the number of murders of Guatemalan peasants by government-sponsored death squads reached staggering proportions, the original luster of PBSUCCESS turned blood-red.

Epilogue to PBHISTORY: The Pesky Facts

Just as the United States sent investigators into Iraq following the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003 to find evidence supporting the rationale for the invasion, so the CIA sent investigators into Guatemala in 1954 to find evidence of communist influence in that country. In Operation PBHISTORY, the CIA sought evidence to support its allegations that the Guatemalan government was acting under the influence of the Kremlin. In early July 1954, the CIA’s Deputy Director of Plans Wisner—the same man who wanted the New York Times to stop publishing Sydney Gruson stories on Guatemala—sent officers from the counterintelligence staff to Guatemala to find evidence of external communist control.

Upon its arrival, the team found that many government records had already been ransacked during the course of the coup. After taking painstaking efforts to acquire, reassemble, and analyze as many records as it could, the team essentially came up empty-handed. They took photographs of bookshelves of communist writers but found virtually nothing that suggested that Guatemalan officials had links to the world of communism outside of its own borders. After the team first reported back on July 28 of the lack of evidence, CIA Headquarters reiterated to them the importance of their mission:

We again call to your attention and that of entire PBHISTORY team the extreme importance of any and all documentary evidence tending to establish contacts,
connections and courses of dealing as between Arbenz regime and/or Guat Communist Party and leaders on the one hand, and Moscow-Prague and international Communist organization on the other hand. ODACID [CIA headquarters] particularly keen obtain any such documentary evidence soonest possible to assist in tying down allegations still made in some quarters that Guat Communist apparatus was purely indigenous affair, not directed, controlled or guided by world Communist hqs.83

The additional efforts led to similar results. A scholar who had access to the PBHISTORY files reported, as described in the CIA’s own history, that the team “found no traces of Soviet control and substantial evidence that Guatemalan Communists acted alone, without support or guidance from outside the country.”84 The U.S. government historians who released the declassified version of PBSUCCESS offered the following comment about the results of the government’s unsuccessful attempt to find documents linking Arbenz and his government to a wider communist conspiracy.

By the beginning of September 1954 all the major documentary sources in Guatemala, including the Foreign Ministry and the Communist Party, had been explored, but few incriminating documents were found. The Station in Guatemala concluded: “All sources agreed Commies and govt. implicated officials either destroyed or personally took out damaging documents. . . .

While considering the overall [PBHISTORY] mission a success, the report admitted that “very few” “Communist damaging” documents had been found.85

When some of the PBHISTORY documents were published in Guatemala, the CIA was dismayed that Latin American countries did not find them to be of any interest. Only one foreign news service even carried an announcement of their release. “The others ‘felt the story was not “spot” news, and consequently did not value it.’” “The conclusion reached was that the bulk of the documents ‘may be of value for research study.’”86

As the final insult to the theory of Soviet influence over Guatemala, American officials, following the coup, sought to deport some Guatemalan communists to the Soviet Union. But upon attempting to deport them, American consular officials learned that this could not be arranged in Guatemala because the Soviet Union did not even have diplomatic relations with Guatemala and that its nearest embassy was in Mexico City.

In June of 1954, Americans had the choice of believing the assertions of Arbenz, whom they had been told (falsely) by the press was a Moscow-controlled communist puppet who was fighting the church, or Castillo Armas, who had entered his country under the banner of “God and Honor” with the full support of the Catholic Church and the CIA. Americans trusted genial General Eisenhower and considered Guatemala a satisfying success in the Cold War, the first communist country to have been brought back to the fold of the free. But for the people of Guatemala, particularly the peasants and the Mayans, the nightmare was about to begin.
Within weeks of the collapse of the Arbenz government, American protégé Carlos Castillo Armas became the new president of Guatemala. Seeking to remove the taint of having come to power through a coup and having been placed at its head by the Yankees from the north, Castillo held an election where he garnered 99.8 percent of the vote, a remarkable achievement in that he had spent the previous three years in exile following his failed coup attempt in 1951 and he had helped overthrow what had been a popular and democratically elected government. The American media did not, however, subject Castillo’s government to the same critical suspicion that had been accorded his predecessor. But within two years even the most sanguine in the American media reached the conclusion that Castillo was corrupt and undemocratic. Nevertheless, there was no clamor for his overthrow.

On February 25, 1999, 45 years after CIA officers celebrated their role in bringing down the government of Jacobo Arbenz and in installing that of Carlos Castillo Armas, Father Juan Hernández Pico, S.J., was apprehensive as he made his way to the Teatro Nacional in Guatemala City. He would be in attendance for the release of the report of Guatemala’s Historical Clarification Commission (CEH-Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico), which had been created to inquire into the murders, forced disappearances, and torture that had plagued Guatemala during the decades of military rule following the coup of 1954. Father Hernández was a liberation theologian from Nicaragua who had been strongly critical of the rightist military governments of Guatemala. He had little hope that the CEH—which had been created by the 1994 Accord of Oslo to “clarify with all objectivity, equity and impartiality the human rights violations and acts of violence that have caused the Guatemalan population to suffer, connected with the armed conflict”—had taken its responsibilities seriously. The 50 years of armed conflict had witnessed the killing of 200,000 Guatemalan civilians, most of whom were peasants. Father Hernández personally believed it was Guatemala’s military governments that bore the principal responsibility for the vast majority of the killings. The American press and the U.S. government, however, had suggested that “both sides” of the conflict were to blame as if there were an “immoral equivalence” between the two.

The CEH was charged with uncovering and presenting the facts with historical truth. But when the three-person commission was finally named, Hernández and many others feared that its report would be a whitewash of the brutal actions of the long stream of military rulers.

The commission members elected to prepare the CEH report did not inspire much confidence among those who wanted to see the truth revealed. Many feared that they were not up to the task. The commission’s president, Christian Tomuschat, a professor of international law in Berlin with political links to the Christian Democrats, had earlier headed up the United Nations’ monitoring of the Guatemalan human rights situation and had failed to impress. Although [the second commission member]
Otilia Lux de Coti is ethnically Mayan, many felt that her comfortable economic position had shielded her from the armed conflict; others feared that the murder of [the third commission member] Alfredo Balsells Tojo’s son had left him mentally unfit to carry out the task entrusted to him. Such were the rumors circulating in Guatemala on the eve of the report’s official presentation.91

When the CEH Report was finally released at a public ceremony on February 25, 1999, the audience included, in addition to Hernández Pico, the president of Guatemala, Alvaro Arzu Irigoyen, many high-ranking military officers, government officials, and Guatemalan human rights activists. The auditorium was filled to capacity and television screens broadcast the proceedings to those standing in the packed lobby. Almost immediately, the skepticism that Hernández had carried with him to the meeting vanished. He found the speeches to be “unexpectedly frank” and watched as “the report took everyone by surprise.” It was “a stunning and socially momentous event” and a “catharsis for the audience.” The “most repeated word during the presentation was ‘cruelty.’” “Again and again the audience in the National Theater burst into applause.” There was a three-minute standing ovation in honor of the recently assassinated Guatemalan bishop, Juan Gerardi Conedera, who had been killed in revenge for having denounced human rights abuses and for providing detailed information to the CEH.92 By the end of the meeting, Hernández Pico reported,

the audience found it increasingly difficult to breath[e], attacked by pain, shame and tears, surprised by the nature of the accusations made by the commission members. Some undoubtedly responded with indignation and rejection, but for the majority there that night, it was a most welcome if anguishing surprise. For the first time, what we had already learnt through rumors, private investigations, testimonies and books, but never in the mass media, was publicly and authoritatively stated. For the first time…the world heard the true dimensions of the tragedy in Guatemala.93

According to the CEH report, Memory of Silence, the worst period of abuse in Guatemala’s history occurred during the years 1978 to 1984, which included the most notorious massacres.94 At this time the crimes of the Guatemalan government

were committed with particular cruelty, with massacres representing their archetypal form. In the majority of massacres there is evidence of multiple acts of savagery, which preceded, accompanied or occurred after the deaths of the victims. Acts such as the killing of defenceless children, often by beating them against walls or throwing them alive into pits where the corpses of adults were later thrown; the amputation of limbs; the impaling of victims; the killing of persons by covering them in petrol and burning them alive; the extraction, in the presence of others, of the viscera of victims who were still alive; the confinement of people who had been mortally tortured, in agony for days; the opening of the wombs of pregnant women, and other similarly atrocious acts, were not only actions of extreme cruelty against the victims, but also morally degraded the perpetrators and those who inspired, ordered or tolerated these actions.95
The extent of the cruelty is mind-numbing.

The...Guatemalan State repeatedly and systematically violated the right to life, through what this Report has called arbitrary executions. In many cases this was aggravated by extreme irreverence, as for instance, in situations in which the corpses were abandoned with evident indications of torture, mutilation, multiple bullet holes or burn marks. The perpetrators of these violations were Army officers, specialists and troops, death squads that either operated under the protection of the authorities or with members of these authorities, members of the Civil Patrols or military commissioners, and in certain cases, private individuals, specifically large land owners, with the consent or direct collaboration of state authorities.96

The abuses were so severe against the Mayan people, who constituted more than 80 percent of the victims, that the CEH Report used the term “genocide” to describe the “massacres that eliminated entire Mayan rural communities.”97 The report made it perfectly clear that the abuses were not caused by rogue elements within the military, but that they were the orchestrated policy of the Guatemalan governments and that responsibility went right up to the presidents of the country.98

The administrations of Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan were in power during the years of the worst cruelties. Midway through the Carter administration, at the point that the Historical Clarification Commission identified the beginning of the upsurge in brutality of the regime, the Carter administration cut off military aid to Guatemala. But with the inauguration of President Reagan in 1981, the position of the government immediately switched. President Reagan’s verbal support for then-President José Efraín Ríos Montt was strong. In describing the man whose government was later shown to have been committing mass murders and even genocide on its own population at the very time that Reagan was meeting with him in December 1982, President Reagan said “I know that President Ríos Montt is a man of great integrity and commitment...I have assured the President that the United States is committed to support his efforts to restore democracy and to address the root causes of this violent insurgency.”99 Although the subsequent analysis of the CEH identified this as one of the worst periods, when the government was committing genocide against the Mayan peoples, State Department officials publicly announced that the real perpetrators of the worst violence were communist rebels.

In an article published on January 25, 1982, after the Reagan administration had been in office for a year, Time magazine noted that violence was “reaching new levels even for Guatemala” but suggested that the abuses were being committed by the “anonymous death squads” on “both sides” of the conflict.100 While recognizing that both sides contributed to the conflict, and while acknowledging that the government had an “appalling human rights record, widely considered to be one of the worst in the Western hemisphere,” the Time article thereupon focused on rebel abuses as if somehow to suggest an equivalence in the evil of the two sides while implying that the rebels were worse.
According to the CEH’s report, there were indeed horrendous acts of violence committed on “both sides.” But the sheer quantity of the abuses by the government was so much greater than those by the rebels that the attribution of responsibility to “both sides” provides unwarranted credence to a presumption of something like “moral equivalence.” Again, according to the report, an estimated 93 percent of the murders, tortures, beatings, and rapes were committed by the government and its agents. The “violence was fundamentally directed by the State against the excluded, the poor, and above all, the Mayan people, as well as against those who fought for justice and greater social equality.” Not only were the governments responsible for the vast number of infractions, the governments’ policies of stifling all peaceful and democratic forms of opposition prompted rebels to engage in violence.

The CEH Report holds the United States accountable as a precipitating cause for much of the violence that came to Guatemala. While recognizing that Guatemala’s problems had roots deep in the colonial era (for which the United States was not responsible), it notes that the only time that Guatemalan governments attempted to respond to the social and economic problems in a serious way was during the period 1944–1954, a period that the United States brought to a swift end when it toppled the government in the coup of 1954. “After the overthrow of the government of Colonel Jacobo Árbenz in 1954, there was a rapid reduction of the opportunity for political expression.” While recognizing that Guatemala’s own history was important for understanding the events in the 1950s, the CEH underscored the role played by the United States and that its emphasis on military responses to social disenchantment had deadly consequences.

* * * *

Presidents Eisenhower and Reagan are broadly admired by many Americans who believe that the two men particularly embodied values that are important to their country: faith in God, optimism, belief in prayer, reliance on the productive capabilities of business, support for a strong military, and respect for “peace through strength.” Eisenhower’s 1950s are often seen as a golden era in American life, a time before drugs, pornography, and violence did so much to harm the moral fabric of the country. Many believe that President Reagan helped restore America in the 1980s to the position that it had lost in the 1960s. He was credited with rebuilding the United States into a world power, and he continues to be honored for bringing an end to the Soviet Union. During his funeral services in the Washington National Cathedral, President Reagan was praised for playing a decisive role in winning the Cold War, and his famous words—“Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”—were endlessly repeated and warmly applauded. Nothing, however, was said about the murders of the nearly 200,000 Mayan people by the Guatemalan government to which his administration restored military aid (nor about his government’s role in restoring military aid to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq). When the facts about Guatemala ultimately emerged, the American people showed little interest in learning about them and were untroubled by the legacy. Guatemalans did not have that luxury.
Religion and the Origins of American Involvement in Vietnam

But the most important aspect of Communism is that Communism is ANTI-GOD... WITH HEAVEN’S WILL VICTORY IS OURS.
—President Ngo Dinh Diem, 1954

President Diem said that if it hadn’t been for the dedicated anti-communism of about a million Catholics, Vietnam could never have kept going this long.
—General Edward G. Lansdale, January 17, 1961

1954: Seeking a Miracle in Vietnam

In January 1954, at the beginning of the second year of his presidency, Dwight D. Eisenhower was caught in a seemingly insoluble dilemma. Vietnamese communist forces, led by the popular nationalist Ho Chi Minh, had been making significant gains in their effort to oust the French who had ruled Vietnam as a colony since the nineteenth century. Although the United States historically had been sympathetic to independence movements, and had even made some early signs of supporting Ho after the Second World War, Americans ultimately feared the spread of communism more than they disapproved of colonialism. Beginning in 1950, the U.S. government had put aside its dislike for colonialism and had begun providing military support to France to help it battle Ho and his Viet Minh forces. But by early 1954, it was becoming increasingly clear that the French might not be able to defeat the insurgents.

Eisenhower, like the American presidents who were to follow him in office, did not want to be accused of “losing” another country to communism and suffer the ignominy that had befallen President Truman when China fell to Maoist forces in 1949. Coincidentally, the first installment of American military support to
France in Vietnam in 1950 had originally been allocated by Congress to support Chiang Kai-shek’s fight against Mao. After Chiang escaped to Taiwan, Truman diverted those funds to support France in Vietnam. Although Eisenhower wanted to prevent Ho’s communist allies from taking control of Vietnam, he nevertheless was adamantly opposed ever to sending American combat forces to the jungles of Vietnam. The official minutes from the January 8, 1954 meeting of the National Security Council quote President Eisenhower as insisting,

with great force, he simply could not imagine the United States putting ground forces anywhere in Southeast Asia, except possibly in Malaya…. But to do this anywhere else was simply beyond his contemplation. Indeed, the key to winning this war was to get the Vietnamese to fight. There was just no sense in even talking about United States forces replacing the French in Indochina. If we did so, the Vietnamese could be expected to transfer their hatred of the French to us. I cannot tell you, said the President with vehemence, how bitterly opposed I am to such a course of action. This war in Indochina would absorb our troops by divisions!4

Despite the fear of losing Vietnam that would haunt Eisenhower and the next three presidents of the United States, the former supreme allied commander in Europe nevertheless felt so strongly that the United States should not send ground forces to Vietnam that he declared unequivocally to the NSC that he would not send the U.S. military even if it meant losing Vietnam to the communists.5 Eisenhower did not restrict his feelings to high-level NSC meetings. He was equally forthcoming in his meetings with the press. Shortly after making this statement at the NSC, he was presented with the same question in a press conference:

Q. Marvin Arrowsmith, Associated Press: Mr. President, to go back for a moment to the question on Indochina, there seems to be some uneasiness in Congress, as voiced by Senator Stennis for one, that sending these technicians to Indochina will lead eventually to our involvement in a hot war there. Would you comment on that?

The President: I would just say this: no one could be more bitterly opposed to ever getting the United States involved in a hot war in that region than I am; consequently, every move that I authorize is calculated, as far as humans can do it, to make certain that that does not happen.6

Two months later, John F. Kennedy, the junior senator from Massachusetts and the man who would follow Eisenhower to the presidency, acknowledged the limitations of American power. “No amount of American military assistance in Indochina can conquer an enemy which is everywhere and at the same time nowhere, ‘an enemy of the people’ which has the sympathy and covert support of the people.”7 Neither the present nor future president, both of whom had fought in wars, could imagine the possibility of sending American soldiers to fight in Vietnam.

One month after Eisenhower insisted that American combat troops should not be sent to Vietnam, international attention became “riveted” on a small enclave in northwest Vietnam called Dien Bien Phu.8 Time magazine described it as an
“Indo-China valley with a barely pronounceable name [that] was transformed... from a scratch on the map into one of the most important places in the world.”

At Dien Bien Phu, the American-subsidized French colonial army had been completely surrounded by Viet Minh forces led by General (and former history professor) Vo Nguyen Giap who was massing an army of 50,000 soldiers that was about to surround and outnumber the French contingent of 12,000 by a ratio of four to one. The battle of Dien Bien Phu, which would rage for two months between March 13 and May 10, would prove to be the last major blow to the French empire in Indochina, just as Yorktown had been for the English in the American revolutionary war. In the words of historian George Herring, it “remains one of the most important battles of the twentieth century.” It was the “first time in the postwar era that anticolonial forces had defeated a western power on its own terms.”

If France were not to succeed at Dien Bien Phu, and if Eisenhower had pledged never to send U.S. combat forces to Vietnam, the president would need a miracle to avoid “losing” Vietnam.

President Eisenhower again raised the specter of the potential collapse of France as the military bastion against communism in Indochina at the next NSC meeting, on February 4, 1954. Attending this meeting was not only President Eisenhower, but also Vice President Nixon, Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles, the secretaries of defense, commerce, and treasury, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the acting secretary of state, and several other high national security officials of the administration. According to the “top secret” minutes of the meeting, in the middle of Director Dulles’s pessimistic briefing regarding the deteriorating situation in Vietnam, President Eisenhower interrupted and offered his own suggestion as to what might help defeat the Viet Minh insurgency and prop up the weakening position of Vietnam’s playboy emperor, Bao Dai.

Since he understood that most of the people of Vietnam were Buddhists, the President asked whether it was possible to find a good Buddhist leader to whip up some real fervor. The President illustrated his idea by referring to the incursion of the Arabs into North Africa and Southern Europe in the early Middle Ages. It was pointed out to the President that, unhappily, Buddha was a pacifist rather than a fighter (laughter)...

The President commented that he still believed that there was something in the idea of a religious motivation, and pointed out how Joan of Arc had managed to defeat a large enemy force and place a timid king upon his throne in France. Dulles pointed out that there were, of course, a million and a half Roman Catholics in Vietnam, and that they included most of the best brains in the country. Undaunted, the President suggested that the Catholics be enlisted too.

At the very moment that President Eisenhower was seeking a Joan of Arc to enlist Catholics in the struggle against communism in Vietnam, an unemployed and impoverished 53-year-old Vietnamese man named Ngo Dinh Diem was living in a Catholic abbey in Bruges, Belgium. Diem, who until recently had been living under the protection of Francis Cardinal Spellman in the United States,
had not held a regular job for almost 20 years. He was, however, a deeply religious Catholic, ferociously anticommunist, and a person who believed he could lead his country to victory against the Viet Minh in part by rallying between one and two million Vietnamese Catholics to his side.

On May 14, 1954, only four months after President Eisenhower urged that a Vietnamese Joan of Arc be found and only one month after he had requested from Congress a dramatic increase of more than one billion dollars to support the fight against communism in Vietnam, Emperor Bao Dai summoned the unemployed Diem to meet him in Paris and he shortly thereafter named him as the new prime minister of Vietnam.12

At the same time that Bao Dai was meeting with Diem in Paris, an international conference on the future of Vietnam was assembled in Geneva, Switzerland. Upon learning that Diem was under consideration as prime minister, the head of the U.S. delegation at Geneva (and formerly Truman’s director of Central Intelligence), Walter Bedell Smith, seized upon exactly the same metaphor that Eisenhower had used in the NSC meeting a few months earlier and expressed his hope that Diem might prove to be a “modern political Joan of Arc.”13

By yet a further coincidence, a young American journalist working in Paris who was not privy to high-level U.S. communications independently seized upon the same metaphor. Interviewing Diem in May 1954, Stanley Karnow observed that the new prime minister “sounded like a Vietnamese version of Joan of Arc forecasting that the national army he planned to mobilize ‘will inspire the people to flock to us.’”14

After arriving in Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem quickly consolidated his power and within one year ousted Bao Dai (in a rigged election supported by his American advisers) and became both the head of state and the head of government of Vietnam. During the following 10 years, from 1954 until his assassination in 1963 (two weeks before the same fate struck President Kennedy), President Diem’s government was subsidized almost entirely by the United States. The United States had found its Catholic leader, a would-be Joan of Arc. In the course of one short day, Ngo Dinh Diem had been elevated from being an unemployed man living on the generosity of others to heading a government underwritten by the most powerful military power in the world.

**Ngo Dinh Diem: The Miracle Man of Vietnam**

*(1954 to 1960)*

Diem is “the tough miracle man of Vietnam [who] has roused his country and routed the Reds.”

—*Life* magazine title of article, May 13, 1957

Diem said to me that problems confronting his government were almost superhuman but he was disposed to tackle them with will and faith.

—U.S. Ambassador Heath, July 23, 195415
Appointment of Diem

In May of 1953, exactly one year before Diem became prime minister, Justice William O. Douglas—perhaps the most left-leaning justice in American history—held a luncheon in the Supreme Court to introduce Ngo Dinh Diem to two newly elected senators who, like Diem, were Roman Catholics. One of them, Senator Mike Mansfield, was already recognized as the leading congressional authority on Asia. The other, 36-year-old John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts, had just defeated the incumbent Henry Cabot Lodge, though his principal claim to notoriety at the time was that he was the son of the rich and influential Joseph P. Kennedy. By 1961, one of the two freshman senators dining with Diem and Douglas would become the senate majority leader and the other would be president of the United States.16

Diem, like Kennedy, was the son of a well-known Catholic political figure who had risen to national prominence despite his country’s popular and political prejudices against Catholicism. Diem’s father, Ngo Dinh Kha, had served the emperor in the Vietnamese imperial court in Hué.17 The Ngo family was of the Mandarin class. His ancestors had been converted to Roman Catholicism by missionaries in the seventeenth century. Diem’s father had become famous in Vietnam for his public resignation from the court in protest against French colonial political decisions. Diem’s oldest living brother, Ngo Dinh Thuc, was a prominent Roman Catholic cleric who would shortly become the archbishop of Hué and the primate of the Roman Catholic Church in Vietnam.18 Bishop Thuc had first met the future Francis Cardinal Spellman 20 years earlier when they were both young men studying for the priesthood in the Vatican in the 1930s.19 By the time of the May 1953 luncheon, Cardinal Spellman was the most powerful Catholic cleric in America, and he was famous for his virulent anticommunism as well as his unfailing support for another prominent Irish-Catholic politician—and Kennedy family intimate—Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin.20 Joseph Kennedy also had known William O. Douglas since the time they were both commissioners at the new Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in the 1930s. But as of the time of this 1953 luncheon, guests Diem and Kennedy were perhaps better known as the sons of famous and truculent fathers rather than for being themselves.

The longstanding friendship between Diem’s brother and Cardinal Spellman—combined with Diem’s deeply felt anticommunism—had prompted the cardinal to become Diem’s principal promoter in America. By 1953, Diem had already been living in Catholic Maryknoll seminaries in New York and New Jersey for the preceding two years under the patronage of the cardinal. Spellman had actively promoted his Vietnamese protégé through his influential contacts both in and outside of government. Diem was not, however, unknown to American officials in Asia. In 1947, Diem urged U.S. diplomats to cease supporting the colonial French and redirect that financial aid to him.21 As a young man, Diem had held regional government positions in Vietnam, and he had once served
briefly as Emperor Bao Dai’s minister of the interior. In their cables to Washington, American diplomats in Vietnam in the late 1940s and in 1950 referred to Diem as the “leading lay Catholic” of Vietnam, in contrast to his older brother, Thuc, who was the leading clerical Catholic. 22

While friends and colleagues were promoting Diem during the first year of the Eisenhower presidency, the situation on the ground in Vietnam was deteriorating. American officials increasingly believed that France might not be able to hold on to its former colony. At the same NSC meeting in January 1954, where Eisenhower first announced his opposition to sending American troops to Southeast Asia, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles proposed that CIA Director Allen Dulles begin to prepare contingency plans for clandestine operations in Vietnam. The proposal of the brothers Dulles was adopted by the NSC, and, within days, the CIA began preparations for a new base of operations that would be called the Saigon Military Mission (SMM). This CIA mission was fated to play a critical role in shoring up Diem during his first year in office and would later help orchestrate the rigged election that led to the ouster of Emperor Bao Dai a year later.

On March 13, 1954, the long-awaited battle of Dien Bien Phu began at dusk—and not auspiciously for the French foreign legion. Within the first 48 hours, two of the major fortified French positions had collapsed and the only airfield was put out of commission—meaning that all future supplies would need to be dropped by parachute. French pressure on the United States to provide additional air transportation and needed supplies mounted. On April 7, 1954, as the battle had been raging for three weeks, two significant events took place in Washington, D.C. First, freshman Senator John F. Kennedy delivered a widely praised speech calling for France to declare immediately its willingness to grant Vietnam full independence. Kennedy asserted that the Vietnamese overwhelmingly wanted independence and that many supporters of Ho were less enchanted by his communism than they were by the fact that he was leading the movement for independence. By granting full independence, Kennedy argued, more Vietnamese would be prompted to fight against communism. Though the speech was applauded by Republicans and Democrats alike, it was criticized by French officials. Granting independence to Vietnam, they argued, would stimulate the drives for independence that already had broken out in Algeria and Morocco. On the same day as Kennedy’s speech, the Eisenhower administration announced its increasing commitment to Vietnam by asking Congress for more than one billion dollars in military and economic aid for Indochina. 23

In the battle of Dien Bien Phu, like the battle of Yorktown during the American revolutionary war, a sizable segment of the colonial power’s expeditionary force had been completely surrounded and cut off from supplies by revolutionary cadres. The forces of the stronger military power were beaten into submission by the highly motivated and well-placed nationalist forces that were aided by outside powers. France was on the winning and revolutionary side during the battle of Yorktown but on the losing and colonial side at Dien Bien Phu.
While the world watched France lose its military struggle in Vietnam, diplomats from the Soviet Union, China, France, Britain, Ho Chi Minh’s Viet Minh, the United States, and other countries met in Geneva, Switzerland, to negotiate the political future of Korea and Indochina. In its side meetings with France and Great Britain in Geneva, the United States’ hard line against communism, combined with its dislike of ongoing British and French colonialism, made negotiations difficult. “The flurry of American diplomatic activity in April 1954 exposed fundamental cleavages between the United States and its allies.”

France urgently sought additional logistical military support from the Americans to help rescue the increasingly desperate situation at Dien Bien Phu, while Americans, including Senator Kennedy, were increasing pressure on France to renounce its colonial ambitions in Vietnam. President Eisenhower went so far as to express his personal displeasure with the British for failing to push France to declare independence for Vietnam.

With the ongoing discussions already provoking mutual recriminations among the United States and its allies, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles arrived in Geneva to participate in the multilateral talks. Dulles, who despised communists on a visceral level, could endure being in Geneva for only a week and while there pointedly refused to shake hands with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. Dulles later proudly announced his diplomatic success by informing an NSC meeting that if the American position in Geneva had been any less well articulated, there “would have been more talk of too many stiff-necked Presbyterians, of sanctimoniousness, and of invoking lofty moral principles.” Dulles’s self-congratulations to the contrary, historian and diplomat Townsend Hoopes famously said that the secretary of state in Geneva “conducted himself with the pinched distaste of a puritan in a house of ill repute.” Secretary Dulles was on a moral crusade against communism on behalf of the United States.

The French legion at Dien Bien Phu fell to General Giap’s Viet Minh troops on May 7, leading to renewed attention in Geneva and Washington to the political future of Vietnam. Only three days after the collapse of the French garrison, the U.S. State Department apparently foreseeing the United States as the emerging foreign power in that country, produced a list of 15 potential Vietnamese political figures for possible American backing as the new Vietnamese prime minister. The person heading the list, Ngo Dinh Diem, was the only one who had spent the three previous years actively lobbying for the position in the corridors of power in the United States. Americans had come to the conclusion that it would be beneficial, if not absolutely essential, to install a fervently anticommunist Catholic to lead the opposition to communism, the insurgency, and Ho Chi Minh. France was about to begin withdrawing from Vietnam.

At the moment that Diem’s name topped the State Department list, he was living in the abbey in Bruges, Belgium. Diem had long been disliked by those in the French government who knew him, as well as by Emperor Bao Dai, an animosity that Diem reciprocated. (Only a few months after holding his nose and making the appointment, Bao Dai described Diem as being a “psychopath who wishes to
martyrize himself even at the price of thousands of lives and national treasury. [Diem sees] his task as leading a holy war.”) The French commissioner general for Indochina said of Diem in June 1954 that he was “too narrow, too rigid, too unworldly, and too pure to have any chance of creating an effective government in Vietnam.”²⁹ So might Charles VII’s advisers have warned the young king about the unworldly purity of Joan of Arc. The French heroine would be more successful than the Vietnamese politician, though they would meet similar fates.

As early as October 1953, the unemployed Diem graciously let it be known that he was prepared to set aside his own negative feelings about Bao Dai and that he would be willing to return to political life in Vietnam. The emperor summoned Diem to come see him in Cannes and Paris. Shortly thereafter, the emperor surprised American officials by appointing as his personal envoy to the Geneva talks none other than Diem’s brother, Ngo Dinh Luyen.³⁰ On May 18, 1954, one week after the State Department placed Diem’s name at the top of a list of potential candidates for prime minister, Luyen informed American diplomats in Paris that the emperor had not only met with Diem but that he was now prepared to name Diem as the new prime minister. The American diplomats were unsure whether Luyen’s report was accurate or whether he was manipulating his intermediary position to advance the interests of his brother. In order not to be taken by surprise, the American embassy in Paris immediately contacted Diem.³¹

The documentary record does not provide direct evidence as to why Bao Dai appointed Diem. A leading historian of the Vietnam War, writing before several documents were declassified, noted that “Diem’s route to the premiership of South Vietnam remains obscure. . . . [Former OSS Chief William] Donovan and prominent Catholic-Americans such as Spellman and Mansfield, with or without the support of the CIA, may have forced Diem on a reluctant Bao Dai. More likely, the emperor turned to Diem as a means of getting the American support he needed to break free from French dominance.”³² While there is no documentary proof revealing secret American attempts to convince the emperor, there is a credible circumstantial case that either Americans actually tried to influence him or that he believed that Americans wanted him to appoint Diem and that he did so as a way to gain American support at the time that the French were collapsing. Luyen (the intermediary) did tell the Americans that Bao Dai was prepared to launch a new political strategy in Vietnam if he could be assured of American support.³³ Thus Bao Dai, needing an infusion of American military and economic support to supplant that of the departing French, was likely willing to set aside his personal distaste for Diem and offer him as the bait to lure American support. Through Luyen, Bao Dai flatteringly told Americans that he welcomed their advice, and he urged them to provide direct military aid to Vietnam rather than channel it through the French. Whatever was in Bao Dai’s mind when he selected Diem, his choice was well received by an American government that needed encouragement to provide economic and military support to Vietnam.³⁴ For whatever reason, only one month after the State Department gave Diem its favored ranking, and four months after Eisenhower advocated that a Vietnamese Joan of Arc be
found to prop up Emperor Bao Dai, the emperor put aside his personal distaste, ignored French opposition, and anointed the Catholic and fiercely anticommunist Diem as his new prime minister. There is also important evidence that Diem’s family was actively promoting him through political maneuvers in Vietnam in 1953 and 1954. Bao Dai later described his reasons for the appointment.

From my earlier experience with him, I knew that Diem had a difficult character. I was also aware of his fanaticism and his messianic tendencies. But, in the present situation, there was no better choice. He was well-known to the Americans, who appreciated his intransigence. In their eyes, he was the man best suited for the job, and Washington would not be sparing in its support of him. [In addition, he and his family would have the cooperation of nationalists.] Finally, because of his intransigence and his fanaticism, he could be counted on to resist communism. Yes, he was truly the right man for the situation.35

Between April and June of 1954, coinciding with the presumed departure of the French and the presumed arrival of Diem, “the Eisenhower administration adopted a change of policy with momentous long-range implications…. The administration began to plan for the defense of the rest of Indochina and Southeast Asia.”36 Diem immediately became the key figure around whom the United States ultimately would organize its strategy for the next decade. The “Eisenhower administration in 1954 and after firmly committed itself to the fragile government of Ngo Dinh Diem.”37 Although the United States would repeatedly insist during the next 10 years that American aid would be contingent on the implementation of critical economic and political reforms, Diem ultimately never made those reforms—and yet the American aid never stopped flowing.

Unknown to anyone attending the Supreme Court luncheon in May 1953, or the NSC meetings in January and February 1954, the upcoming military conflict in Vietnam was to become the bloodiest military struggle that the United States would endure during the next 50 years. While American political leaders may have had different reasons for becoming involved in the conflict in Southeast Asia, the justification that was most frequently repeated was the need to prevent the spread of communism. And the person whom the United States chose in the struggle against communism saw himself as a Joan of Arc rallying the Catholics of Vietnam, just as President Eisenhower had hoped.

Helping Make Miracles Happen

Vietnam’s newly minted prime minister did not travel to Geneva to participate in the ongoing international talks about the political future of his country but flew immediately to Saigon to begin forming his government. Diem, who did not have strong support from either his emperor or the French, also did not elicit support from the diverse Vietnamese ethnic, political, or religious groups with one notable exception: Roman Catholics. The New York Times, which covered Diem’s arrival in Saigon, reported on June 26 that “Newly appointed Premier Ngo Dinh Diem arrived today and received an enthusiastic welcome from his
Roman Catholic supporters. However, the great mass of the Saigon population stayed home.38 But in addition to his Catholic coreligionists, Diem would quickly gain the support of the head of the CIA’s Saigon Military Mission: Colonel Edward Lansdale.

Edward Lansdale, a former advertising executive, was a colorful and notorious character who first gained prominence as a result of his apparently successful handling of CIA psychological warfare operations in the Philippines in the early 1950s. He helped the struggling Philippine government defeat the Huk rebels who were promoting leftist-oriented land reforms for the peasantry. Through a series of propaganda coups and questionable tactics, Lansdale helped elect a strong American ally, the Roman Catholic Ramon Magsaysay, as president of the country.39 Lansdale had been able to influence—through charm, skill, cleverness, trickery, and bribery—journalists both in the United States and the Philippines to report favorably on Magsaysay. Lansdale’s supervisors were alternatively charmed and appalled by his ability to “sell” the United States in the Philippines and to “sell” Magsaysay and the Philippines in the United States.40

The schemes that he promoted consisted of peculiar and contradictory combinations of innovation, naïveté, cultural sensitivity, and American-centric consumerism. Lansdale had so thoroughly ingratiated himself to Magsaysay that he was invited to live in the Malakañan Palace. In the early 1950s, before the long-term consequences had been felt, the CIA had the reputation of pulling off wonder-working miracles on the cheap in Iran (1953), and, most recently, in the Philippines and Guatemala. By sending Lansdale to Vietnam, Allen Dulles was signaling to American officials that he wanted Lansdale to perform the same type of magic in Vietnam that he had conjured in the Philippines. Lansdale himself certainly believed that he was up to the task.

Although the CIA’s clandestine SMM project for Vietnam had first been proposed by John Foster Dulles at the January 1954 meeting of the NSC, it was not until after Diem’s name had first appeared atop the United States’ list of preferred candidates that Allen Dulles decided to send Lansdale to head up the SMM operation in Saigon. Lansdale’s specific charge was to “wage political-psychological warfare” that would include paramilitary and propaganda campaigns in the north.41 CIA officer Chester L. Cooper later explained that the CIA “was given the mission of helping Diem develop a government that would be sufficiently strong and viable to compete with and, if necessary, stand up to the communist regime of Ho Chi Minh in the north.”42 As the Pentagon Papers reported, Lansdale was to become a “key figure in installing and establishing Diem as President of South Vietnam.”43 The decision to send Lansdale to head the SMM’s project of supporting Diem was not surprising within the U.S. intelligence community, where he already had a reputation as a miracle worker.

Lansdale arrived in Saigon on June 1, three weeks before Diem. Although Lansdale was almost completely unfamiliar with Vietnam at the time of his arrival, he quickly immersed himself in Vietnam and became a dominant figure who many, though not all, believe was largely responsible for shaping American
policy in Vietnam during the early Diem years. Lansdale has always been considered a controversial figure, and opinions vary widely in terms of whether he had deep insights into Vietnam and human nature, or whether he was more of an oddity who clumsily sought to introduce Madison Avenue advertising techniques on a peasant society. There is evidence to support both interpretations. John Paul Vann said that South Vietnam “was the creation of Edward Lansdale.” President Kennedy’s hard-nosed national security adviser, Walt Rostow, believed that Lansdale knew “more about guerilla warfare on the Asian scene than any other American.” His biographer asserted that “President Kennedy was a particularly big fan of Lansdale’s unorthodox methods in fighting communism.” Joseph B. Smith, a CIA officer, argued that the “same Americans and Filipinos who created the Magsaysay administration in Manila created the Diem government in Saigon—Ed Lansdale and his team.” He developed highly unorthodox approaches to CIA activities ranging from the odd-but-successful to the simply bizarre. Although he held many unfavorable stereotypes about Asians, he also was a person who developed genuine and sincere affection for other peoples and cultures. In pursuit of his Cold War beliefs, however, he supported violent actions with grave human consequences.

By the time that the new prime minister had arrived in Saigon at the end of June contemporaneously with the collapse of the Jacobo Arbenz government in Guatemala, the three-week-old Lansdale mission had drafted a classified plan of action for Diem to implement. But while Diem was attempting to put together a government in Vietnam with the help of Lansdale, delegates meeting in Geneva were dividing his country into two “temporary” zones divided along the artificial 17th parallel. The Geneva Accords, which were not signed by the United States or Bao Dai, provided that the “demarcation line is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary.” Article 14(d) of the Geneva “Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam” authorized the peaceful and humane transfer of civilians who wished to cross the line separating the north from the south. Although the temporary boundary between the two was intended to last only until 1956, the U.S. government began almost immediately to act as if the temporary 17th parallel were a permanent international boundary between two sovereign countries. While Bao Dai and his new prime minister asserted the fictional position that they ruled an undivided Vietnam, the 17th parallel became a de facto political boundary between two separate jurisdictions, one communist under Ho in the north and the other under Bao Dai and Diem in the south. Following the Geneva Accords, diplomats and the press increasingly referred to the two jurisdictions as North Vietnam and South Vietnam—as if they were two sovereign states along the lines of North and South Korea.

One of the most serious and immediate complications for Diem’s rule was that the division of Vietnam along the 17th parallel had left between 800,000 and 1,000,000 of his most obvious allies—Roman Catholics living north of the boundary—to the regime of Ho Chi Minh. The potential consequence of Diem’s loss
of support of his northern coreligionists was immediately grasped not only by Diem, but independently by the French and by Colonel Lansdale. Diem’s first reaction was to attempt to convince the French to guarantee the safety of the three principal Catholic enclaves north of the boundary. In Geneva, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Tran reported that Diem had already requested that the French provide arms to the Catholic militias in the areas of North Vietnam that were being evacuated by the French.\textsuperscript{50} As the negotiations in Geneva continued, and as it was increasingly clear that the three provinces in the north with large Catholic populations would remain in the north under the communists, Diem’s government issued a written protest in Geneva that declared:

\begin{quote}
The State of Vietnam cannot abandon the Catholic populations which have shown their will to remove themselves and to be removed from the Communist regime. That is why our delegation asks: For the protection of the populations that everything possible be undertaken in order that the population may be effectively protected against what would be for them a political and moral annihilation, and that their transfer into a non-Communist zone, if they show this desire, be assured under the most effective conditions.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

When the French made it clear that they were either unable or unwilling to guarantee long-term security in the northern Catholic enclaves, several observers of the situation, without consulting each other, simultaneously and independently recognized that it would be vital for the future of the Diem regime either to convince or to cajole Catholics living north of the 17th parallel to emigrate to the south in order to provide additional support for the tenuous Diem government. As conveyed in the clipped language of an American diplomatic cable to Washington, Diem urged that the United States “must endeavor to transfer Catholic and other anti-Communist elements from the north to free zone of Vietnam. If he could have public assurance of American aid and support, he believed it would be possible that 1 million, perhaps even 2 million, northerners would take refuge in south.”\textsuperscript{52} Secretary of State John Foster Dulles heard an equivalent plea in Geneva by the Vietnamese foreign minister—who also happened to be a Roman Catholic.

\begin{quote}
The Foreign Minister was a Catholic and had come from one of the Delta provinces [of North Vietnam] recently turned over to the Vietminh. The worst of the situation, said Secretary Dulles, was that the most virile elements of the Vietnamese population lived in the Tonkin Delta area [of North Vietnam]. It might be possible to transfer a few of the natives of the Delta to the non-Communist areas, but probably not many.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

All Dulles was seeking was a few (not too many) virile men.

While the French were unable to provide the requested security for the three principal enclaves of Catholics north of the 17th parallel, they nevertheless understood their importance for the future of the fledgling Diem regime that was unpopular in the south apart from its Catholic supporters. France warned that the division of Vietnam “constituted a certain problem as the bulk of his support
came from the Catholic provinces of the north and Diem had very little support in the south and did not get along well with the various sects in that region. The Catholic population remained in the north under Vietnam control. The French government advised Ambassador Dillon in Paris that because the bulk of Diem’s support would come from the Catholic population then living in North Vietnam, their relocation and proper treatment upon resettlement would be “of the greatest psychological importance in Vietnam.”

Within weeks of Diem’s plea to allow the Catholics to leave the north and Dulles’s July 15 suggestion that it “might be possible to transfer a few,” the U.S. Navy began preparations to evacuate northerners, particularly Roman Catholics, from the north to the south. The military name for this seaborne evacuation, based in Haiphong harbor of North Vietnam, was “Operation Exodus.” It would soon become known to the U.S. public as “Operation Passage to Freedom.” The consequences would prove to be immediate and dramatic. “Within weeks after Geneva, northern Catholics began pouring into predominantly Buddhist South Vietnam at the rate of 7,000 a day, adding new religious and ethnic tensions to an already volatile mix.” The United States and France were jointly planning to relocate between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Catholics in North Vietnam to the south in Operation Exodus, which became the largest seaborne evacuation in history.

If Joan of Arc could not go to the mountain, the mountain would come to her.

Colonel Lansdale and the CIA did not let the natural course of events determine who above the 17th parallel would remain. In accordance with its assigned mission, the CIA launched a concerted propaganda campaign to convince, and frequently frighten, Vietnamese civilians—particularly Roman Catholics—to flee to the south. In a statement made years later, Lansdale acknowledged that “U.S. officials wanted to make sure that as many persons as possible, particularly the strongly anti-communist Catholics, relocated in the South.” In order to convince Catholics to resettle in the south, Lansdale and the CIA’s SMM conducted “black ops” that planted false stories and rumors in the north to frighten its residents. Many of the manufactured stories spoke of the brutality of the communist cadres. One “carefully planted story,” of which Lansdale was particularly proud, was spread by soldiers wearing civilian clothing who reported that “a Chinese Communist regiment in Tonkin [was] taking reprisals against a Vietminh village whose girls the Chinese had raped, recalling Chinese Nationalist troop behavior in 1945 and confirming Vietnamese fears of Chinese occupation under Vietminh rule.” Another was a “black psywar strike in Hanoi” that dropped authentic-looking but false leaflets about the Viet Minh’s plans once it took over Tonkin, including the Chinese communist plans to conscript Vietnamese into slave labor camps. Lansdale proudly reported that his planted phony leaflets about devaluing the currency were so effective that the day following the distribution of these leaflets, refugee registration tripled. Two days later Viet Minh currency was worth half the value prior to the leaflets. The Viet
Minh took to the radio to denounce the leaflets; the leaflets were so authentic in appearance that even most of the rank and file Viet Minh were sure that the radio denunciations were a French trick.  

Leaflets were dropped from a plane that suggested that Hanoi was going to be hit by a nuclear bomb. False astrology almanacs were produced. Other leaflets announced that the “Virgin Mary was moving south.” Lansdale also fostered rumors of communist brutality targeting Catholics.

While Lansdale proudly acknowledged his successful deceptions made in the name of religion and against communism, he was apparently less forthcoming about the extent of his use of bribes and similar financial incentives he used to convince northerners to flee the communists. Refugees who would flee the north were promised the equivalent of $85.00, which was approximately the per capita annual income of Vietnamese at the time. It was not only psychological warfare in which Lansdale engaged. His agents were busy contaminating the north’s oil supply and transportation systems. He was also sending into the north military equipment, including explosives, to disrupt Viet Minh activities. Although no North Vietnamese agents were engaging in economic or psychological warfare inside the United States, Lansdale and the U.S. government believed that as a part of their mission to advance democracy and oppose communism that it was perfectly justifiable for them to be wreak havoc on North Vietnam’s economy.

What had began as a trickle of northerners moving to the south turned into a flood. Over a year’s time, between 1954 and 1955, approximately one million people were transported by American and French naval vessels and airplanes from the north through Haiphong harbor to resettle in the south, principally in Saigon and its outlying regions. Of the million Vietnamese who relocated, between 600,000 and 700,000 were Roman Catholics. The Pentagon Papers estimated that 65 percent of the Vietnamese Catholics residing in the north moved to the south and that it was the “religious orientation [of the refugees] which ultimately assumed the greatest importance in South Vietnam’s political life.” By the end of the migration, there were more practicing Catholics in Saigon than in either Paris or Rome. According to the Pentagon Papers, the bulk of American economic aid to South Vietnam was not spread among the indigenous Buddhist peasants of the south, but was distributed to the immigrants—predominantly Catholics—from the north. “By U.S. estimates, the 2% of total population affected by resettlement [from the north] received 50% of total aid.”

In its retrospective analysis of the evacuation of Catholics from the north to the south to prop up the Diem government, the Pentagon Papers suggested that the “successful” effort may have backfired by giving Diem a false belief that he had increased his base of supporters while in reality he had further alienated himself from the majority of the Buddhist population in the south. The predominantly Catholic Tonkinese refugees provided Diem with a claque: a politically malleable, culturally distinct group, wholly distrustful of Ho Chi Minh and
the DRV, dependent for subsistence on Diem’s government [which was dependent on the U.S. government], and attracted to Diem as a co-religionist. [They were in addition] a source of reliable political and military cadres. [For other Vietnamese in the south, they came to exemplify the] dominance of South Vietnam’s government and army by northerners. The refugees catalyzed Diem’s domestic political rigidity, his high-handedness with the U.S. and his unyielding rejection of the DRV and the Geneva Accords.70

The Catholic refugees who had been enticed into moving south gave Diem a false sense of security.

President Eisenhower sent a trusted colleague to Vietnam as his special representative in 1954, who became, in effect, the U.S. ambassador to Vietnam from November 1954 to May 1955. It was the same General J. Lawton “Fightin’ Joe” Collins who had previously served under Eisenhower in Europe and had attempted to quell army revolts when demobilization was not proceeding rapidly enough for the servicemen’s taste.71 Upon arriving in Vietnam, Collins, although himself a Roman Catholic, was immediately distressed by what he observed as Diem’s short-sighted effort to surround himself with Catholic loyalists from North Vietnam.

In conclusion, I said that Diem was making it very difficult for me to continue supporting his government. I said that if he continued his present course we would be under heavy pressure to support a change in the government. If it were not for refugees, for whom we have heavy responsibility, I feared I might have to recommend withdrawal of U.S. support.72

Later in 1955, Collins ultimately advised Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles to pull the plug on Diem.73

General Paul Ely, the French commissioner general and commander in chief in Vietnam, “characterized Diem as an extremely pig-headed man who became more so under pressure.”74 The historian of the Vietnam War, George Herring, concluded that “Diem’s vague words only slightly obscured his authoritarian tendencies. His model was the Emperor Ming Mang, the nineteenth century ‘reformer’ who created an assembly of mandarins to approve his royal decrees.”75 Agreeing in principle with this assessment, Roger Hilsman, who served as President Kennedy’s assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs, believed that “Diem was mandarin to the core.”76 In the spring of 1955, at the same moment that Secretary of State Dulles was lauding Diem, the outgoing U.S. ambassador to Vietnam concluded that, “Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, very little actual progress has been made in converting these programs from paper plans into actual achievements. The primary reason, in my judgment, has been the failure of Diem to organize an effective cabinet of strong and able men and to decentralize to these men the power to act within their assigned ministries.”77 The British ambassador to Vietnam, Sir Hubert Graves, like many of the French, had little regard for Diem’s political judgment. “Diem lacked support of sects, army, police and Catholics of center. In fact he had little support and
lacked ability to spark free Vietnam into energetic action. While he might be useful as figurehead, he did not have necessary qualities of leadership." 

The *Pentagon Papers* also noted the negative effect of Diem’s placing members of his Catholic family in key positions that prompted charges of nepotism and corruption. His “family thus became an entirely extra-legal elite which in class and geographic origin, as well as religion, was distinct from the South Vietnamese as a whole.” The novelist Graham Greene who had lived in Saigon, and was himself a Catholic, warned ominously as early as 1955 that it is Catholicism which has helped to ruin the government of Mr. Diem, for his genuine piety has been exploited by his American advisers until the Church is in danger of sharing the unpopularity of the United States. An unfortunate visit by Cardinal Spellman...has been followed by those of Cardinal Gillroy and the Archbishop of Canberra. Great sums are spent on organized demonstrations for visitors, and an impression is given that the Catholic Church is occidental and an ally of the United States in the cold war.

The Vietnamese themselves made what they perceived to be the unflattering link between Diem, his Catholicism, and the United States when they referred to him as “My-Diem”—“Diem the American.” According to the *Pentagon Papers*, “there is no doubt, however, that Diem’s Catholicism from 1954 on acted to his disadvantage among the non-Catholic masses, and enhanced the My-Diem image of his government’s being an instrument of alien power and purpose.”

Historian Herring, in noting the criticisms of Diem that were already rife in 1954 and 1955 wrote, “indeed, what is striking in retrospect is the extent to which early on-the-scene estimates of the prime minister’s leadership potential anticipated the problems that would develop later.” But John Foster Dulles and others had already decided that the commitment of the United States was already too deep to change course.

**Using Religious Persecution to Sell Vietnam to Americans**

The CIA’s propaganda campaign that began in 1954 in conjunction with Operation Exodus targeted Catholics and other North Vietnamese to convince them to move south. But this was only one part of the CIA’s larger propaganda effort in conjunction with the evacuation. The second became known under the name “Operation Passage to Freedom,” and it targeted not the Vietnamese, but the American people, in an effort to convince them that their government was compassionately fighting the atheistic communists who were persecuting the Catholics of North Vietnam. At the same time that Eisenhower’s personal representative, General Collins, was recommending to the president that Diem was not competent and that the United States should abandon him, Colonel Lansdale was promoting Diem in the American press as a person who helped rescue Christians from persecution in the north—the evidence of which he had himself helped fabricate. The *Pentagon Papers* highlighted the importance of the
efforts of the CIA’s domestic propaganda campaign. First, the CIA “provided the world the earliest convincing evidence of the undemocratic and oppressive nature of North Vietnam’s regime.” Second, “the refugees engaged the sympathies of the American people as few developments in Vietnam have before or since, and solidly underwrote the U.S. decision for unstinting support of Diem.” Thus religion would not only help save Vietnam from the communists, but stories of religious persecution would help convince Americans to support Diem in Vietnam.

The first sustained images and impressions that the American public received about Vietnam following the coverage of the battle of Dien Bien Phu came in 1954 and 1955 when it received carefully orchestrated images and stories of courageous Catholic martyrs abandoning all of their earthly possessions in favor of religious freedom in the south. American newsreels, magazines, and newspapers were filled with descriptions and photographs of destitute Vietnamese refugees fleeing the “communist north” towards the “free south,” echoing the divisions of nearby Korea. The American press reported on the million-person migration as if it were a spontaneous rejection of communism and the manifestation of a natural yearning by people for freedom. The media portrayed the typical refugee as a devout Catholic who wished to practice his or her religion freely. Newsreels depicted U.S. naval vessels crammed with humble and hungry huddled masses being transported to freedom by kindhearted and white-uniformed sailors of the U.S. Navy. Photographs showed the small, stooped, frightened, and bedraggled Vietnamese peasants finding safety in the arms of their big, clean, strong American protectors.

Those who moved south following the Geneva Convention no doubt did so for a variety of reasons, from the fear of communism to family unification, or for economic opportunity. Certainly the Viet Minh had already introduced some harsh economic measures in the north that were often implemented with ruthless means. What the American public was not told, however, is that much of what they were seeing and hearing was the result of a CIA-instigated propaganda campaign designed to frighten Catholics in North Vietnam and to elicit sympathy for them in America.

The most widely read magazine in the United States in the 1950s, the Reader’s Digest, published the story of one ship’s transport of Vietnamese Catholics from north to south in a story entitled “They’ll Remember the Bayfield” (by William Lederer, later one of the authors of The Ugly American). The Bayfield story was concurrently published as a book and became a bestseller, and it helped reinforce the impression in the American mind that the U.S. military had become a force protecting Christians in Vietnam against communist persecution. In one passage of Lederer’s story, he recounts the response to the inquiry why so many Vietnamese were fleeing to the south: “Because the communists are burning our churches and won’t let us worship Christ.” According to Professor Seth Jacobs, “if any one image dominated Americans’ understanding of Vietnam during the Eisenhower era, it was that of the Catholic refugee: starving, tortured, and
devout, with an inflexible claim on America’s conscience.” The refugees were being transported to the south where they were welcomed by the Christian political leader who had been placed in that position through the efforts of the U.S. government.

Lederer’s two Bayfield publications had been a resounding success. But he and his writings were about to be marginalized by the emerging blockbuster story of a young U.S. Navy “doctor,” then in his late twenties, named Tom Dooley. Although largely forgotten today, between 1954 and 1959, Tom Dooley traveled the path from failure and obscurity to national celebrity. By 1955, “Doctor Dooley” had become the name and face associated with the need for the United States to help the Vietnamese, particularly its Catholics, who were suffering from communist persecution and torture. By the end of the 1950s, American public opinion surveys named Dooley among the 10 most admired men in the world. Like Diem’s elevation from obscurity to fame, Dooley’s path was not accidental.

After failing his final year of medical school in St. Louis, the young Tom Dooley joined the navy and was assigned to a ship that would be enlisted to serve in Operation Exodus. Because he had some medical training, though no medical degree, “Doctor Dooley” was assigned to provide medical care for the Vietnamese refugees who were being evacuated through Haiphong harbor. With an ability to speak modest French, Dooley, unlike his shipmates, was able to communicate both with the French occupying forces and French-speaking Vietnamese. He advised journalists covering the refugee story, which brought him to the public eye. He increasingly became the host for dignitaries visiting Haiphong, including diplomats, religious figures, and military officers, who wanted to see the rescue operation firsthand. With the encouragement of navy officials, Dooley began recounting the stories he had heard about Catholics fleeing to the south to escape torture and religious persecution.

Though it was not known at the time, and though the evidence is not entirely clear, it has become increasingly apparent that at least by mid-1955, CIA officials consciously decided to promote the young and increasingly famous “Dr. Dooley” in an effort to help persuade the American public to support American involvement in Vietnam generally and the government of Ngo Dinh Diem in particular. Dooley’s biographer finds “little doubt” that Dooley’s medical team in Vietnam was part of “Lansdale’s painstaking blueprint for launching a viable Diem regime.” Another example of this occurred when Dooley, who really had done nothing more than had hundreds of others assigned to Operation Exodus, was suddenly honored by Premier Diem as an Officier de l’Ordre National de Viet Nam, the highest award that the government could bestow upon a noncitizen. The idea to give this award to Dooley, however, did not originate with Diem or any of his Vietnamese assistants but once again with CIA disinformation specialist Edward Lansdale, who later admitted that he was the one who made the recommendation to Diem and even typed up the announcement of the award. Lansdale made sure that the photograph of Diem awarding the handsome
young naval officer was published in newspapers throughout the United States. Lansdale also helped arrange to have his friend Lederer, author of the book on the Bayfield, become Dooley’s adviser and editor for a book that the navy was encouraging Dooley to write. It appears that Lederer undertook the assignment to assist Dooley directly from Allen Dulles, the director of Central Intelligence.

With Lederer’s help, Dooley published in 1956 the book Deliver Us From Evil, which Lederer arranged to have excerpted and published in Reader’s Digest. The foreword to Dooley’s book was written by Admiral Arleigh Burke, chief of naval operations, who boasted that Dooley “had won for America the love and admiration of thousands and thousands of refugees.” Indeed, “it is a story of which the United States Navy is proud.” It was not common to have the chief of naval operations write such a glowing foreword to a book penned by a sailor still in his twenties.

Dooley’s Deliver Us From Evil recounts dozens of gruesome forms of torture against humble Vietnamese Catholic priests: having sticks jammed into their eyes so that they would be unable to read the Bible; having their tongues cut out so that they could not celebrate Holy Mass; and having nails driven into their skulls. The communists, according to Dooley, did not limit their attacks to priests. Dooley tells us that they jammed chopsticks into the ears of children so that they would never hear the message of Christianity and the communists burned to death a Christian youth leader. The book is replete with images of impoverished Vietnamese peasants fleeing from the communists. “Usually they had some clothes, always a rice bowl and chopsticks, invariably a religious object—a crucifix, statute or sacred picture.” What almost all refugees sought was “the right to continue to worship their God.” In contrast to the communists, the book portrays the U.S. Navy, acting in the name of the good American people, as helping Christians fleeing torture “to gain what they knew was religious freedom in the South under Ngo Dinh Diem.” The U.S. military was on a mission to help bring religious freedom to the world.

Dooley’s book soon became a bestseller in the United States, and the author crossed the country delivering hundreds of well-covered speeches, interviews, and radio and television broadcasts warning Americans of the dangers of communism in Vietnam and at the same time unabashedly promoting the virtues of capitalism and the American military:

Everything we did was done because the American navy made it possible for us to do it. Soon we began to feel a quiet pride in our hearts at being Americans. We had come with ships to take them to freedom, with medical aid to heal their ills and bind up their wounds, with large supplies of life-saving drugs freely donated by American firms... And we brought not bombs and guns, but help and love.

This positive blend of generous contributions from American private enterprise and a kindhearted U.S. military promoting “help and love” contrasted starkly with the brutality of the communists who used torture, propaganda, and violence against the sincere and oppressed Christians of Vietnam.
Very quickly, Dooley became “the most popular American in noncommunist Vietnam.”102 The movie rights to his book were purchased by Kirk Douglas, who slightly resembled Dooley, and there was some discussion about which of the two would play the title role in the film (which ultimately was never made). In 1958, the newly formed folk music group The Kingston Trio, capitalizing on the name of the navy doctor, released what became their first chart-topping hit and gold record, “Tom Dooley,” which further promoted popular recognition of the name.103 Public opinion polls rated Dooley, along with perennials President Eisenhower and Billy Graham, as one of the “most admired” men in America. In December 1959, a Gallup poll of Americans named him the seventh most admired man in the world. This poll placed Dooley in the company of Winston Churchill, Albert Schweitzer, and Pope John XXIII, and ahead of General Douglas MacArthur. Francis Cardinal Spellman warmly embraced Dooley as a more attractive and compassionate image of a Catholic layman fighting communism than Joseph McCarthy. The University of Notre Dame later erected a statue to its famous alumnus and it now grants an annual award to a graduate who exhibits outstanding service to humankind. Tom Dooley, more than any other American at the time, came to personify the United States’ support for Vietnam as a bulwark against communism and atheism.104

The underlying problem with Dooley’s public image and message was that it was built on a web of half-truths. Dooley did not graduate, as claimed, from Notre Dame, a deception for which the university retroactively absolved him by awarding him an honorary doctorate in 1960.105 Though he later became a devout Catholic, his hell-raising undergraduate years at Notre Dame were notorious for his having flouted the rules and engaging in rakish pranks. Nor did the “doctor” graduate from medical school at St. Louis University, having been distracted by society balls, country club events, horse races, and fox hunts.106 He joined the navy to see the world in 1953 for the express purpose of escaping the embarrassment of either repeating his final year of medical school or being dismissed. Thus the man who sold himself as “Thomas A. Dooley, M.D.,” and who pilloried the communists for their lies and deceptions, was never a licensed medical doctor. Also not disclosed to his wider public was his penchant for celebrity and self-promotion. Although he actively advertised himself as a humble and self-effacing person interested in serving only God and his fellow human beings, this image was created in large part to show up those in his native St. Louis who considered him to have been an academic and personal failure.107 Also not disclosed at the time was that he, a person who had become a public relations bonanza for the U.S. Navy as a symbol of compassionate Catholicism, was prematurely dismissed from the U.S. Navy in early 1956 because of his homosexuality.

His deceptions were not simply of the autobiographical sort. “Dooley embellished his best-selling book, Deliver Us From Evil, with horrific—and unsubstantiated—tales of Vietminh atrocities and exaggerated his own and America’s good works in Passage to Freedom to build support for nation building and Diem.”108
Dooley’s own contemporaneous letters to his mother about his experiences during Operation Passage to Freedom are typically mundane in comparison to the gory scenarios he painted in his later book.\textsuperscript{109} There were debates, including among American officials, regarding the extent to which Dooley’s horrendous stories—which he knew at best only through hearsay—were true, exaggerated, or completely fabricated.\textsuperscript{110}

At exactly the same time that religion was being used on the home front to emphasize the differences between communists and Americans, the people of the United States were being served dramatic stories from abroad—exaggerated if not outright fabricated by the U.S. military and the CIA—to highlight the difference between Americans who love and support religious freedom and the communists who despise it. The raising to prominence of “Dr.” Tom Dooley was not the last effort on Lansdale’s part to help shape American public opinion on the struggle for Vietnam.

* * * *

Diem now had only one last electoral hurdle to overcome: the referendum slated by the Geneva Accords to be held in 1956 that would choose a single leader for a unified Vietnam. The Geneva Accords of 1954 provided that the division of Vietnam into northern and southern zones along the 17th parallel would be temporary and that a vote would be held in July 1956 to elect a leader for the entire country.\textsuperscript{111} From the beginning, no informed observer of Vietnam doubted that in any open election, communist leader Ho Chi Minh would win overwhelmingly. President Eisenhower famously said in his memoirs:

I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indochinese affairs who did not agree that had elections been held as of the time of the fighting [in 1954], possibly 80 per cent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader rather than Chief of State Bao Dai.\textsuperscript{112}

The \textit{Pentagon Papers} state that in 1954 the United States opposed holding the elections slated for 1956 “because Ho Chi Minh would have then won them handily.”\textsuperscript{113} A 1955 National Intelligence Estimate—that was not disclosed to the American public—reported with regard to Ho that “no other Vietnamese currently possesses his great popular appeal among the Vietnamese as a symbol of nationalism.”\textsuperscript{114} Ho would have “no great difficulty in maintaining control in North Vietnam.”\textsuperscript{115} (This NIE did not opine on Diem’s popularity.) A year later, at the time that the elections were originally scheduled to be held, another NIE reported that “Ho Chi Minh continues to occupy a preeminent position among Vietnamese Communist leaders... His prestige as a nationalist leader is still a significant factor in the attitude of many people in South Vietnam and Southeast Asia toward the Vietnamese Communist regime.”\textsuperscript{116} North Vietnam sought the aid of the international community to hold elections, all to no avail. This was not only the opinion of President Eisenhower and those with whom he consulted, it was that of Dac Khe, South Vietnam’s minister of democratization
and the deputy chief of Vietnam’s delegation at Geneva, who believed that as of 1954 the Viet Minh would win the scheduled elections. Although the United States wanted Diem to announce publicly that elections could be held if certain conditions would be observed—conditions that the United States believed North Vietnam would never accept—Diem refused even to discuss the issue with the North Vietnamese and the United States. The only elections the miracle man would accept were those where he could control the outcome.

American decisionmakers had access to U.S. intelligence assessments showing that Diem would lose, and they knew that Diem would not even pretend to be willing to hold elections. Despite these facts, and in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the religiously devout Secretary of State Dulles, who despised communist lies, announced publicly that “We also believe that, if there are conditions of really free elections, there is no serious risk that the Communists would win.” U.S. government officials continued to praise the Diem regime that had refused to conduct open democratic elections and denounced the communists who could not be trusted to hold fair elections. Eisenhower’s memoirs are completely silent about the 1956 elections and the reason that they were never held.

The United States announced its official position on the elections through Walter Robertson, the assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs.

President Diem and the Government of Free Viet-Nam reaffirmed on April 6 of this year and on other occasions their desire to seek the reunification of Viet-Nam by peaceful means. In this goal, we support them fully. We hope and pray that the partition of Viet-Nam, imposed against the will of the Vietnamese people, will speedily come to an end. For our part we believe in free elections, and we support President Diem fully in his position that if elections are to be held, there first must be conditions which preclude intimidation or coercion of the electorate. Unless such conditions exist there can be no free choice.

Robertson did not state what Eisenhower and other knowledgeable observers knew and believed: that if there were a free and peaceful election Ho Chi Minh would win and Vietnam would be united under Ho. Nor did Robertson candidly acknowledge that the man whom the United States was supporting had resolutely refused to accept the results of a free election. Apparently, the only part of its underlying justification on which the United States was actually prepared to act was prayer.

Garlands for the Miracle Man

In May 1957, Ngo Dinh Diem made an official state visit to the United States. His popularity in the United States was so high that President Eisenhower took the rare gesture of sending his personal plane to Honolulu to pick up Diem. It was not unusual for American taxpayers to subsidize Diem’s activities. Approximately two-thirds of the total Vietnamese budget was paid for by American aid—the highest per capita contribution that the United States made to any country
in the world. President Eisenhower, in one of only two or three occasions during his presidency, traveled to Washington National Airport to greet an arriving head of state. On May 8, the president greeted Diem on a red carpet at National Airport, praised him for having “exemplified in your part of the world patriotism of the highest order,” gave to him a key to the city, and then drove back to the White House with him in his limousine convertible. Diem received a similar ceremonial honor when the U.S. Congress invited him to address a joint session of Congress. He had private dinners with Vice President Nixon and Secretary of State Dulles, both of whom had been early supporters. He went to New York and was feted by Democratic Mayor Robert Wagner in a parade witnessed by between 100,000 and 250,000 people. Mayor Wagner declared that “history may yet adjudge [him] as one of the great figures of the twentieth century.”

He was the guest of honor at a gala banquet at the Waldorf-Astoria hosted by the American Friends of Vietnam (AFV) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), over which the publishing titan Henry R. Luce presided and where Cardinal Spellman offered the invocation. At the banquet he received the first “Richard E. Byrd Memorial Award,” for which President Eisenhower, in a telegram, praised him “for the highest qualities of heroism and statesmanship.” He was widely and wildly praised by both Democrats and Republicans. Diem was lionized for his fortitude in having faced down not only the communists and Viet Minh, but his other domestic opponents including the so-called “sects” including the dangerous mafia-like Binh Xuyen, and the syncretistic religious groups Cao Dai and Hoa Hao.

Diem’s popularity in the United States peaked at the time of his visit, and he was lionized by the media and public figures as a superb leader, “the tough miracle man of Asia,” as Vietnam’s “Symbol of Independence,” and as the “Asian Liberator.” Diem’s fervent Catholicism was now treated as a great virtue publicly just as it had been admired privately by some American officials in the early 1950s. In its profile of Diem, the New York Times declared that “His life—all of it—is devoted to his country and to his God. A Roman Catholic, at an early age he took a vow of chastity, which he renews daily.” Joseph F. Flannelly, the same bishop who welcomed dictator Anastasio Somoza to church in 1952, declared that “The entire world acclaimed him when this God-fearing, anti-Communist and courageous statesman saved Vietnam.” Just as the dictator Lenin was praised for burning the midnight oil in his office in the Kremlin, so was the virtuous and virginal Diem lauded. “Long into the night the lights burned in Mr. Diem’s palace with the new Premier following a rigorous 16 to 18-hour-a-day schedule.” A scant four years earlier, the impoverished Diem had walked the streets of New York and certainly could not have afforded a meal at the Waldorf.

Among the values that Diem took credit for promoting in Vietnam, and which he was widely praised for establishing, were democracy and human rights. In his speech to Congress he contrasted the democratic methods he was promoting as opposed to totalitarianism. He thanked the U.S. Congress for having promoted efforts to “safeguard liberal democracy through aid.” He was proud that he
had been able to seek “economic progress without sacrificing essential human liberties.”

We affirm that the sole legitimate object of the state is to protect the fundamental rights of human beings to existence, to the free development of his intellectual, moral, and spiritual life. We affirm that democracy is neither material happiness nor the supremacy of numbers. Democracy is essentially a permanent effort to find the right political means in or to assure to all citizens the right of free development and of maximum initiative, responsibility and spiritual life.

This speech was strongly praised as showing that the United States was supporting the right person. The *New York Times* gushed editorially that these words to Congress “could have been expected from a man of deep religious bent. It is also not surprising that a firm concept of human rights should come from a man of erudition fully steeped in the French and American applications of this concept.”

Diem was praised lavishly and supported financially by the Eisenhower administration between 1954 and 1961, with the state visit of 1957 symbolizing the peak moment of the adulation. So it is curious to turn to Eisenhower’s post-presidential memoirs to see how he described this important ally on whom the United States had based its policies in Vietnam for 10 formative years. Eisenhower discussed Vietnam in the first volume of his presidential memoirs, *Mandate for Change*, which was published in 1963 at the time that Diem’s reputation was plummeting and in the year that he was overthrown and assassinated. Although *Mandate for Change* as a whole covers the years 1953 to 1956, his discussion of Vietnam essentially stops in 1954 with the Geneva Accords and makes only one passing reference to Diem thereafter. The memoirs say nothing, for example, about his having sent his personal envoy and colleague, General J. Lawton Collins, to Vietnam, nor anything about the prescient warnings that Collins gave him about Diem’s having already alienated the majority Buddhist population by the end of 1954. Nor does Eisenhower say anything about the unwillingness of Diem and the United States to agree to the elections called for by the Geneva Accords (which neither the United States nor Bao Dai signed). The second volume of Eisenhower’s memoirs, *Waging Peace* (covering the years 1957 to 1961), published after the discredited Diem’s assassination, does not mention Diem even once, and it certainly does not recount the lavish praise accorded to the major U.S. ally by Eisenhower, Nixon, Johnson, Spellman, and the American media. The man in whom the United States had invested billions of dollars in a global fight against communism in his religiously infused presidency was simply left out of the memoirs. As president, Eisenhower repeatedly stressed the critical importance of Vietnam by reference to its vital natural resources of tin, tungsten, and rubber, and to its position as a domino which justified American military aid. During his presidency, Eisenhower had praised Diem as a valiant leader who served as a bulwark against the tide of communism. But the once vital threat and the heroic resistance offered by Diem evaporated from the story once Eisenhower turned the keys of the White House over to Kennedy.
Prior to 1963, the American people were repeatedly told by government officials and the media that Diem was religious, honorable, courageous, and an anti-communist reformer—the “miracle man” of Asia. But from the very beginning, close observers saw another side of him: petulant, rigid, authoritarian, politically incompetent, and intolerant of dissent. By 1960, Diem had silenced and jailed his political opponents, including leading former noncommunist ministers and politicians who dared to issue a public statement (the Caravelle Manifesto) calling upon Diem to institute democratic reforms. Diem was unequivocally an authoritarian leader set on suppressing political opposition rather than uniting his country in a battle against the north. Even one of Diem’s strongest American supporters, William Henderson of the Council on Foreign Relations, while praising Diem’s accomplishments in the pages of *Foreign Affairs* in 1957, nevertheless candidly admitted that “from the beginning Diem has ruled virtually as a dictator. South Viet Nam is today a quasi-police state characterized by arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, strict censorship of the press and the absence of an effective political opposition.”

In Guatemala in 1954, the United States government helped overthrow a left-leaning, democratically president based on accusations both less harsh and less true than those that Henderson employed while otherwise defending Diem. America’s dictatorial allies praised God—and Americans rewarded them richly.


In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended.
—T.S. Eliot, “East Coker” in the *Four Quartets*

Diem’s attack on Buddhist pagodas in August 1963 “marked the beginning of the end of the Diem regime.”

—Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge

The number of American soldiers based in South Vietnam rose steadily during the first three years of the administration of President John F. Kennedy. Euphemistically described as “advisers,” the soldiers trained Vietnamese and engaged in some limited combat operations. By the end of the Kennedy administration, the total number of troops stationed in the country was less than 20,000. In April 1963, the U.S. military commander in Vietnam, General Paul D. Harkins, optimistically suggested to the American public that the war in Vietnam might end by Christmas. Shortly after he suggested that the fighting between the South Vietnamese and the Viet Cong might be over before the arrival of the Christian holy day, events broke out in Vietnam that set the majority Buddhist population squarely against its Christian president. But in April, no one yet knew that a series of events beginning that month would provoke a chain of events
leading to massive Buddhist protests against Diem that would in turn provoke a coup d’état and his assassination.¹⁴⁵

Much had happened in the 10 years following the May 1953 luncheon at the Supreme Court building where Justice William O. Douglas introduced the unemployed Ngo Dinh Diem to newly elected junior senators Kennedy and Mansfield. By May of 1963, Kennedy was the president of the United States, Mansfield was senate majority leader, and Diem was the president of the country that had been a major focus of American military activity during the previous decade and that would play an increasingly traumatic role in American public life in the following decade. The Kennedy administration between 1961 and 1963 had continued to increase its support for Diem’s government, both in military supplies and American manpower. Although the war in Vietnam would end in 1975 when the last U.S. troops were withdrawn from Saigon, it would continue to polarize public debates and even plague the next generation of American politicians with accusations and insinuations about those who did and did not serve in Vietnam: Michael Dukakis, Dan Quayle, Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Dick Cheney, Colin Powell, John Kerry, George W. Bush, and John McCain.

Diem’s defenders, however, saw him as a deeply pious man, principled, and an insightful leader who understood the complexities of his country and who could skillfully play off warring factions against each other and hold his country together against almost impossible odds. Whatever the merits of these two opposing interpretations, it is probably fair to say that the majority of American officials involved with Vietnam were partisans of Diem at least through 1957 when he made his triumphal visit to the United States. While Diem had his loyalists at the time, including notably Edward Lansdale, and although some such as Professor Mark Moyar have vigorously defended him a half-century later, the critical turning point for most American decisionmakers in their support for Diem began to turn in May of 1963. Curiously, just as it was his Christian religion that originally helped propel him to power in the predominantly Buddhist country in 1954, so it was his treatment of Buddhists in 1963 that turned his predominantly Christian supporters in the United States against him. While members of the National Security Council laughed in February 1954 when reminded that Buddhists were pacifists and could not be expected to fight communists, no one was laughing in 1963 when the Buddhist pacifists of South Vietnam mobilized against Diem and helped bring about his downfall.

The Buddhist Crisis of 1963

Buddhist hostility first erupted on 8 May [1963] over regulations governing the display of flags in public religious ceremonies in the city of Huế, where at least eight deaths occurred during efforts of security forces to disperse a crowd. The severity of the outburst suggests long-simmering resentment among Buddhists over the pro-Catholic orientation of the Diem family and administration. Many Buddhists, as well as other religious groups, feel that special privileges and favoritism toward
Catholics, stemming from French rule, have been perpetuated by the Diem family partiality.

—CIA analysis of the situation in Vietnam, June 3, 1963

At the end of April in the city of Hué, the former imperial capital of Vietnam, the Catholic Church held a celebration commemorating the anniversary of the installation of Ngo Dinh Thuc, the brother of President Diem, as the archbishop and primate of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. The minority Catholics marched in Hué waiving papal flags in honor of Archbishop Thuc. Two weeks later, the Buddhists of Hué announced that they too would have their own religious celebration on the traditional anniversary of the birth of Buddha. Another of Diem’s brothers, Ngo Dinh Canh, the “political boss” of the central provinces that included Hué, announced that no Buddhist flags would be allowed to be unfurled at the celebration because it would violate a five-year old decree against the display of religious flags. When the Buddhists understandably complained that the Catholics had been allowed to wave their flags only two weeks earlier, they were told this had been a mistake and should not have been permitted. Sensing a double standard, the Buddhists decided to meet and display their flags in defiance of the government’s warning.

On May 8, the Buddhists began a demonstration to display their flags and accused the government of denying religious freedom to them. Though there are disputes about exactly what happened, most reports suggest that police and armored cars surrounded the demonstrators and that at some point South Vietnamese security officials tossed a live hand grenade into the crowd and then shot some of the demonstrators. Eight or nine people were killed and several others were injured. The government immediately imposed a curfew in Hué, and the situation remained tense for several days afterwards. The repeated demands by the Buddhists to prosecute those who had killed peaceful demonstrators were answered by the government’s retort that it was actually the Viet Cong who had perpetrated the act. Although reports in State Department cables and press reports convinced Washington officials that it was indeed South Vietnamese security officials who had killed the demonstrators, President Diem insisted to the unconvinced American Ambassador Nolting—long a stalwart Diem supporter—that the grenade had been thrown as a provocation by the Viet Cong and that Buddhist leaders were attempting to manipulate events for their own political reasons. Even the Roman Catholics of Hué agreed with the Buddhists and disputed the government’s explanation.

On May 10, a crowd estimated at between 5,000 and 6,000 people (double the size of the first protest) gathered at the Tu Dam pagoda in Hué. They waved flags, carried banners, and demanded that Buddhists be treated equally with Catholics and protested other laws and actions that they believed were discriminatory. The demonstrators taunted police. Americans observers on the scene accepted the legitimacy of the Buddhists’ grievances, and the State Department urged the embassy to convince Diem to revoke Law Decree 10 that treated
Buddhists as second-class citizens despite their majority status. The Vietnamese government rejected all initial demands and said that the language used was “extreme” and provocative, but ultimately it promised to enforce the laws neutrally. Buddhist leaders in Hué were not persuaded that the communique signified any real change in government policy, which prompted the Buddhist monks—bonzes—to go on a hunger strike.

June 3, Buddhist Demonstrations in Hué

A new Buddhist protest erupted in Hué on June 3, 1963, prompting security services to throw gas grenades again into a crowd with resulting injuries to 67 people, including 40 with second-degree burns. Already it was being reported that the government clampdown on what had started as a religious protest was starting to become political, and that it was being perceived as a Roman Catholic government acting against an overwhelmingly Buddhist population. On June 10, David Halberstam of the New York Times noted that American officials in Vietnam had become more publicly critical of Diem now that the latter’s actions were increasingly being perceived as religiously motivated. It seemed that the situation in Vietnam was getting worse, with one American official commenting that it was like “watching something slowly slipping through your fingers.” American officials were increasingly at a loss to answer questions from average Vietnamese about why the United States did not do something to prevent the crackdown on Buddhists. “Americans are not at all pleased to have the world see Vietnamese troops with American arms and training putting down Buddhists riots in Hué.”

On June 8, one month after the first Hué demonstration and only a few days after the most recent protest, the deputy chief of the U.S. mission in Saigon, William Trueheart, met with President Diem to discuss responses to the Buddhist crisis. Although Diem was perfectly cordial, he accepted no responsibility for the crisis, which he blamed on the Buddhists whom he accused of negotiating in bad faith. Trueheart concluded that Diem believed he could solve the problem through the use of firm security measures rather than through negotiations with those who were disaffected. Trueheart met with other Vietnamese officials to press for changes in handling the Buddhist issue. These officials, who made assurances that they would do the best that they could, ultimately produced very little.

At the same time that Trueheart was meeting with Diem, the State Department was preparing a cable for the Saigon embassy suggesting seven actions that should be taken to calm the religious controversy that had erupted. In retrospect, while each of the proposals seems eminently reasonable, it is quite revealing to learn that they were prompted in reaction to an immediate crisis rather promoted as a part of an ongoing strategic effort to understand the country to which the United States had been the principal financial supporter since 1950. Indeed, the cable concludes by announcing that the State Department
“is preparing on a crash basis [a] draft study on Buddhism in Viet-Nam.” Ten years after installing a Roman Catholic to head a predominantly Buddhist country, the State Department decided to undertake a crash course to understand Buddhism in Vietnam. The seven proposals were designed to urge the government of South Vietnam: (1) to repeal Law Decree 10 (which favored Catholicism over other religions), (2) not to display any official signs of mourning for John XXIII (who had died on June 3), (3) to downplay Diem’s political doctrine of “Personalism” because of its ideological ties to Roman Catholicism, (4) to appoint the first Buddhist military chaplains (in light of the fact that the vast majority of South Vietnamese soldiers were Buddhist and there were Catholic military chaplains), (5) to recognize and work with village “cult committees” (Hoi Hung, quasi-official committees who worked with local religious officials), (6) to create a governmental department of religious affairs and to appoint a respected Buddhist to head it, and (7) to permit Buddhist monks and lay leaders to “run for and win seats in August National Assembly elections.”

June 11, Thich Quang Duc Immolates Himself

At 10:00 on the morning of June 11 in Saigon, a Buddhist bonze staged what subsequently became one of the most riveting images to come out of the Vietnam War. Surrounded by up to 700 fellow monks (the numbers vary), Thich Quang Duc, who was driven from Hué to Saigon, arranged for gasoline to be poured over him by a fellow monk followed by the lighting of a match, causing his self-immolation. Malcolm Browne of the Associated Press took the photograph that earned him a Pulitzer Prize in 1964. It shows Quang Duc, seated erect in lotus position, with flames consuming his rigid and impassive body. This image of conscientious resistance to authority, like the civil rights photographs emerging from Birmingham the month before, captured the attention of the world and helped galvanize the mounting resistance to Diem among the Vietnamese and Americans in Vietnam, as well as officials sitting behind desks in Washington who saw the horrifying photographs in their morning newspapers. According the public affairs officer of the U.S. embassy in Saigon, the photograph had “a shock effect of incalculable value to the Buddhist cause, becoming a symbol of the state of things in Vietnam.” On the same day as the immolation, though hours later in Washington, the State Department became alarmed at the significance of the event and its possible ramifications, finding that “the Buddhist situation is dangerously near the breaking point.” Washington authorized the Saigon embassy to tell Diem that “dramatic action” needed to be taken to regain the confidence of the Buddhists. The New York Times reported that the developing crisis with the Buddhists was then seen in Vietnam “as the worst blow in a long time to the Government’s popularity.” Madame Nhu, the beautiful but tart-tongued sister-in-law of Diem, mocked the bonze’s death. Her famous comment that the self-immolation was nothing but a bungled “barbecue” would not be made until later in the summer.
Quang Duc’s fellow Buddhists thought much more highly of him than did Madame Nhu, and hundreds assembled in memory of him at Xa Loi pagoda near the heart of Saigon. The Xa Loi Buddhist complex would, during the next few months, become increasingly seen by the government and Vietnamese citizens as the center of religious and political opposition to Diem and Catholic rule of Vietnam. It was here that the Buddhist supreme priest in South Vietnam, Thich Thinh Khiet, installed himself for negotiations with the government and launched frequent and visible demonstrations. While the analogy should not be overdrawn, Buddhism and Xa Loi would increasingly play a role similar to Catholicism and the Gdansk shipyards in 1980s Poland. The Catholic Church, however, was on opposite sides of the controversies—though Catholics in Poland and in Vietnam defined themselves in a significant part by their role in opposing Communism.

Ultimately the self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc was only the first of seven of highly visible suicides that followed during the next few weeks, each of which was followed by publicity and another round of recriminations.

Discussions among Americans increasingly considered the actions of Diem less in the light of the presumed assumption that force would prompt the desired behavior in the other (Viet Cong, Buddhists, opposition), and that force was more likely provoking behavior that was the opposite of what was desired. Rather than thinking of power as prompting compliance, power was being seen as stimulating the psychologically counterproductive effect of increased resistance. The U.S. mission finally recognized that suppressing the dissent “tended to unify Buddhist groups.”

June 16, Troops Suppress Riots in Saigon

On Saturday night, June 15, while the ashen remains of Quang Duc’s body lay in the Xa Loi complex, Buddhists displayed their flags in violation of government orders. Commenting on this event, David Halberstam wrote that “five weeks ago South Vietnam had a religious dispute and today it is a full-scale political crisis, a rare affair in a country that has no Opposition party and no freedom of the press.” The following day a crowd estimated at 10,000 people gathered nearby in protest. Although Buddhist leaders called off the planned funeral procession, a group of approximately 300 young protesters clashed for 45 minutes with the police, before they were routed by tear gas. That same day the government made some important concessions in principle to the Buddhists, though it conceded less than what the Buddhists were demanding. In the June 16 agreement between the government and the Buddhists, the former agreed to provide “aid” to the families of victims of the May 8 killings, though the government stood fast against using the word “compensation.” It also agreed to provide additional freedoms for the Buddhists that would be comparable to those of Catholics, including the permission to fly flags.

On Thursday, June 27, 1963, President Kennedy announced that he was appointing, as ambassador to Vietnam, the former Massachusetts senator whom
he had defeated for reelection in 1952 and who had been the vice presidential candidate with Richard Nixon in the presidential contest of 1960: Henry Cabot Lodge. That same day a full-page ad appeared in the *New York Times* that may have been the first interdenominational protest by American religious leaders against U.S. policy in Vietnam, and it included Reinhold Niebuhr, Harry Emerson Fosdick, James A. Pike, Stephen Wise, Donald S. Harrington, and other prominent Protestant, Jewish, and Buddhist figures. The advertisement included the famous photograph of the immolation of Quang Duc and it read, “we too protest.”168 A few days later, the Reverend Harrington, minister of Community Church in New York and the secretary of the Minister’s Vietnam Committee, made a harsh and provocative denunciation not only of U.S. policy in Vietnam but he squarely blamed President Diem and the Catholic Church as well. In language that would become quite familiar five years later, Harrington accused the Vietnam regime of being “a vicious dictatorship with the whole paraphernalia of terror imposed by American weapons and backed by American public money and prestige.”169

By the beginning of July, the Central Intelligence Agency had completed its own ongoing and classified Special National Intelligence Estimate entitled *The Situation in Vietnam*.170 Noting that its immediately preceding study from April had focused on the problem of counterinsurgency, the new SNIE focused on what had emerged as the most significant developing problem in Vietnam, which it called the “Buddhist crisis.” The SNIE asserted that tensions were mounting between the Roman Catholics who dominated the government mechanisms and the 70–80 percent Buddhist population of South Vietnam. The Roman Catholic Church also had been favored as a matter of policy over other religions. Though Buddhists had largely been passive prior to that reporting period, this was no longer the case. The SNIE found that Diem, despite almost 10 years in office, had failed to unify the population and instead had divided them squarely along religious lines—with the vast majority of the population becoming increasingly hostile to him and his fellow Catholics. The situation had become sufficiently serious that Diem was by then undermining his American support both in Vietnam and in Washington—and increasingly throughout the United States. The report used highly pejorative terms to describe his behavior, including describing him as “stiff-necked.” The report predicted, albeit in a way that is not falsifiable, that if he did not promptly alter his course, “the chances of a non-Communist assassination or coup attempt against Diem will be better than even.”

By July 15, the Buddhists reached the conclusion that the government was not serious about the June 16 agreement and announced a renewal of their struggle.171 Two days later, approximately 1,000 people gathered at Giac Minh pagoda in Saigon at 8:00 in the morning. One hundred and fifty Buddhist monks led the assembled group in a march to the now famous Xa Loi pagoda only a few blocks away. But, as marchers approached, they saw that barbed wire had been placed around Xa Loi in order to prevent them from entering. The crowd attempted to cross the barrier, but the police beat them back. According to the *New York Times*, the
Buddhists sat down in the street. The sitdown continued for more than an hour until secret police started a counterdemonstration. They carried banners charging that the Buddhists were being exploited by Communists.

Then uniformed, specially trained riot police drew back the barbed wire, and 100 of them went in after the demonstrators.

The policemen grabbed priests as they knelt and clubbed them. They grabbed seated old women and smashed [them] down with clubs. In one alley, several policemen grabbed an old woman and beat her.

...As the struggle was going on, one police official turned to reporters and said, “That’s what happens when there is too much liberty.”

Several of the monks and the women were reported to have been badly injured. As reports of the day’s events were drifting in from Vietnam, President Kennedy was asked in a press conference about the Buddhist uprising in South Vietnam and specifically whether “the South Vietnamese Government has been an impediment to the effectiveness of American aid in the war against the Viet Cong?” In perhaps the most candid and direct statement made by a U.S. president to date, Kennedy responded, “Yes, I think it has.” Kennedy affirmed that the immediate controversy in Vietnam “certainly began as a religious dispute.” While stating that the United States was “not going to withdraw from that effort” in South Vietnam, nevertheless “the decision is finally theirs.”

To the credit of American officials in Vietnam, who had for too long been overly receptive and accommodating to the excesses of the Diem regime, many were finally beginning to take seriously the government’s overly reactive and unwarranted crackdown on Buddhists. It is almost as if the Vietnamese government’s hostility towards peaceful Buddhist opposition had become the final wake-up call for many (but certainly not all) that the Diem regime truly was out of touch and that its communist-baiting and Viet Cong-baiting was no longer seen as credible. American officials were increasingly recognizing the importance of the observations of Buddhist leaders and discounting the explanations, rationalizations, and justifications of Vietnamese government officials. When Vietnamese officials let it be known during the week of July 15 that the official investigation of the May 8 event in Huế had suggested that it was the Viet Cong who had precipitated the crisis, the Diem regime not only lost its last vestiges of credibility with the Buddhists and the Vietnamese people as a whole, but it showed to objective American observers that the Diem regime—which trumpeted the Catholic religion—simply had no decent respect for the honest-to-God truth. American attempts to convince Diem to change his response with respect to the Buddhists began as early as May 18, but they were made without any noticeable effect.

The Buddhist demonstrations that heretofore were to some extent spontaneous and that had peaked at a few thousand suddenly mushroomed into a planned, massive demonstration of 60,000 on July 30. On that Tuesday, seven weeks after
Quang Duc’s self-immolation, Buddhists in five cities in Vietnam marched in memory of Quang Duc, in support of religious freedom for Buddhists, and in opposition to the government.\textsuperscript{175} Despite the impressive size of the peaceful protest in a poor country, Buddhist leaders believed that they had failed to achieve the objective that they had borrowed from the working class of their former colonial power: a general strike.\textsuperscript{176} As tensions continued to mount, and as the divide increasingly was being characterized as one between Catholicism and Buddhism, with the government favoring the one and the vast part of the population favoring the other, many Catholics outside of government became increasingly unhappy that they were being tainted with the political mistakes of the regime in power. Some began to speak out, arguing that the real problem was not Catholicism but the despotism of Diem.\textsuperscript{177} During the last two weeks of July there was a stalemate as the government urged Buddhists to participate in a commission that would study the issue of religious rights in Vietnam, while the Buddhists responded that such a commission would be a sham. The Buddhists insisted that until the government candidly acknowledged that state officials had been responsible for the May 8 killings in Huế—a fact that was undisputed by everyone but the government—there was no purpose in trusting the bona fides of a commission.

Although the Buddhists and the government had been speaking to each other principally through the press, the government had largely attempted to avoid provocative comments in late July and early August. The Buddhists nevertheless increasingly felt themselves to be under siege and placed barriers and barbed wire around the Xa Loi pagoda. On August 3, in a way that almost appears to have been designed to justify the siege mentality, Mr. Nhu and Madame Nhu, in separate statements, fanned the flames. Madame Nhu, in a speech that was subsequently broadcast on Vietnamese radio—and to the deep consternation of the American embassy—accused the Buddhists of having intentionally and barbarically murdered Quang Duc, the man who almost all Vietnamese perceived to be a heroic martyr for the cause of freedom, and having adopted “communist tactics.”\textsuperscript{178} It was also at this time that she made her famous remark that the self-immolation of Quang Duc was a “monk barbecue”—a comment that was so provocative that it prompted the South Vietnamese ambassador in Washington to condemn it, a denunciation made particularly notable by the fact that the ambassador was none other than her own father.\textsuperscript{179}

While Madame Nhu was busy generating controversy in her speech, her husband was speaking to reporters and asserting that if the “religious crisis” were not soon resolved, “it will lead toward a coup d’état.”\textsuperscript{180} The alleged plotters of such a coup, Nhu claimed in his transparent attempt to frighten the U.S. embassy and his Buddhist opponents, were motivated by a desire to crush the Buddhists and oust the Americans from Vietnam.\textsuperscript{181} Such motivations for a plot could not be taken seriously by anyone, suggesting, if anything, either that Nhu was out of touch with reality or that he was making such a claim as a pretext for taking preemptive security measures.
At the same time that Madame Nhu was delivering her August 3 speech that gratuitously provoked the Buddhists, admirers of Quang Duc, and the American embassy, *Time* magazine was preparing a cover story on her that appeared in its next (August 9) issue. The cover photograph shows her standing alone in front of a stained-glass window inside a Catholic Church. (The unidentified figure in the stained-glass window appears to be a woman warrior carrying a spear and shield, and it certainly implies Joan of Arc.) The *Time* story begins by comparing Madame Nhu to historical Vietnamese fighting heroines. It contrasts the physically diminutive woman (“5 ft. 2 in. in high heels”) possessed of “girlish grace” with her tough personality that has made her “one of the two or three most powerful people in the country and [who] in a sense embodies all its problems.”182 Mme. Nhu’s similarities to (and differences from) Mme. Chiang Kai-shek could not have been lost on the redoubtable publisher of *Time* and *Life* magazines, Henry Luce.183 Luce, born in China to Protestant missionaries, had been a leading force in the powerful China Lobby that raised public attention against the scourge of communism in Asia and that promoted Mme. Chiang as a well-educated, forceful, articulate, Christian bastion in the East. While the August 9 story flatters Madame Nhu’s “exciting beauty,” quick wit, and courage, it candidly acknowledges that she is also “vain, arbitrary, puritanical, imperious and devious.” The article does not suffer from naïve optimism about the prognosis for Vietnam and its problems, for which it holds the Ngo family and Mme. Nhu in large part responsible.

*Time* magazine, as did many other observers, recognized that the religious conflict that came to the fore after May 8 was the issue that had recently become most responsible for undermining public support for Diem and most likely to lead to a coup d’etat. The widely read magazine focused on the issue of religion by noting that the beginning of the current controversy was between Buddhists and the government that had been launched with the events of May 8 in Huế. It noted particularly the split between the minority Catholic position of the Ngos and the Diem regime and the majority Buddhists. Diem had shown himself to be “almost completely out of touch with his people. The gap between Diem and the masses was widened by his militant Catholicism.”184 The magazine nevertheless pointed out that the Catholic-Buddhist divide can be greatly exaggerated. During her interview with *Time* near the beginning of August, Mme. Nhu said that she was eagerly awaiting the impending arrival of the newly appointed ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge. The article concluded with a quotation from Mme. Ngo Dinh Nhu, which revealed to American readers that she was fully aware of the famous Boston jingle about the Cabot family. *Time* quoted her as saying that “We hear that [the Cabots] talk only to God.” In response, she was told that sometimes the same was said about the Ngo family. She replied, “In that case, I hope we will talk together, with God in the middle.”

With the exception of the highly provocative statements by the two Nhus, the government continued to try to take a moderate tone in its public pronouncements. But Americans and Vietnamese leaders were receiving reports from the
countryside and the military that the fissure in Vietnamese society was continuing to widen, with the issue of religion as the vehicle employed by the Buddhists to attack the Diem government. Five thousand people again demonstrated in the streets of Saigon on Sunday, August 11.

By now, individual Buddhists began to offer their lives and limbs in sacrifices to the cause. On August 4, the day after Mme. Nhu’s dismissal of Quang Duc’s death as a “barbecue,” a second monk, in his early twenties, immolated himself. The following week, on August 13, an 18-year-old attempted to chop off her hand in Xa Loi pagoda in what she desired to serve “as a humble contribution while our country is in danger.” On the same day, a 17-year-old monk living in Huế burned himself to death. When police and security services arrived the following day to remove the teenager’s charred body, they attacked and beat several monks who tried to restrain them. A few hours later, 80 security officials reportedly beat bystanders at the boy’s funeral. The next day, in the coastal town of Ninh Hoa, a Buddhist nun, in her twenties, burned herself to death. In response to the nun’s death, the inimitable Mme. Nhu declared that “if they burn 30 women, we will go ahead and clap our hands. We cannot be responsible for their madness.”

The day after the nun died, a 71-year-old monk set himself afire in the Tu Dam pagoda of Huế, which finally prompted local authorities to declare martial law in Huế. (Martial law was initially imposed for only two days.) Papers began to connect the recent spate of deaths with the suicide a month earlier of one of Vietnam’s most famous novelists and anti-colonialists, Nguyen Tuon Tam, who had committed suicide by consuming poison the day before his trial on the charge of treason was slated to begin. Tam’s death note accused Diem of being a dictator who was destroying the country. The New York Times then described these collective suicides, for the first time, as “an effort to focus world attention on Buddhist demands for civil and religious rights that the Buddhists alleged President Diem’s Government denies them.” If this was the purpose behind the suicides, it seemed to be working. The day after these words were published by the New York Times, and almost as if in response to them, officials representing the Buddhist population of Hawaii, the most heavily Buddhist enclave in the United States, adopted a resolution calling Diem a “Dictator-President” and called upon the United States, the United Nations, and Pope Paul VI to take action regarding discrimination against their coreligionists in Vietnam. That same day, the newly elected Pope Paul VI confirmed publicly that he had appealed to President Diem to promote peace and understanding in Vietnam.

On that same Saturday, August 17, back in Vietnam, the center of opposition in Huế shifted from robe to gown. The day before, Friday, had seen the 71-year-old-monk self-immolate in the Tu Dam pagoda. On Saturday, in another part of town, the government fired the rector of the prestigious University of Huế. Apparently acting with the blessing of Diem’s oldest brother, the archbishop of Huế, the government fired the head of the university because of his
alleged permissiveness in the face of student radicalism. The rector, who was Catholic, was known to be a supporter of Buddhist demands in the current crisis. In response to the firing, 47 professors and deans of the university—almost one-third of the faculty—resigned in protest. They issued a letter criticizing the American-supported government for its failure to respond to legitimate Buddhist demands and for having fired the rector. The letter was signed by both Buddhist and Catholic faculty members. Three hundred students demonstrated in support of the rector and the faculty. Thus the first spontaneous student protests against the Saigon regime during the war in Vietnam took place not at Berkeley, or Harvard, or Columbia, but at the University of Hué. And the dispute centered not on the role of communism or capitalism or the actions of the U.S. military, but on Catholicism and Buddhism.

The dramatic Saturday protests in Hué, at the pagoda and university, were followed on Sunday by a 15,000-person-strong, sit-down hunger strike in Saigon. Following tactics familiar to students of Gandhi and that were becoming increasingly common in the contemporaneous civil rights movement in the United States, the Buddhists adopted a tough negotiating position that they supported not with threats of violence, but by peaceful resistance. Of course not everyone followed the Buddhist monks’ disciplined pacifism. The following Tuesday, August 20, violent protests broke out in Hué, Saigon, and Danang (a major port city near Hué) where 3,000 demonstrators appeared and clashed with police.

The increasingly salient issue for the Buddhist monks, the faculty at Hué, student protestors, the American press, and the American embassy, was that the government needed to acknowledge responsibility for the killing of nine people in Hué on May 8. Although virtually every observer believed that the evidence overwhelmingly showed that government security services had been the provocateurs, the government stubbornly insisted, without any evidence, that it was communists who had caused the killing. By blaming their enemies rather than acknowledging their errors, the Diem regime lost its last remaining shred of internal legitimacy. As these events were occurring, Ambassador Lodge was slowly making his way towards Vietnam—stopping off in San Francisco and Tokyo on his way.

Though the focus of public attention on Tuesday, August 20 was on the demonstrations in several cities in Vietnam, the most important events were in fact taking place behind closed doors in the presidential palace in Saigon, where Diem, Nhu, and some of their top military officials were in the midst of planning major operations to begin on the following morning in Saigon. Although their American supporters desperately wanted the Diem regime to direct South Vietnamese military power to fight the growing communist insurgency, Diem and Nhu instead thought it more urgent to direct their military and police power against the unarmed Buddhist monks in Saigon. On Tuesday, the decision was made by Diem in executive council to declare martial law the following day and to crush the internal struggle spearheaded by the Buddhist monks.
August 21, Martial Law Proclaimed and Raid at Xa Loi Pagoda

Ambassador Frederick Nolting had been a consistent supporter and apologist for Diem within the U.S. government. As his tour of duty in Vietnam came to an end during the summer of 1963, Nolting made a final visit to the presidential palace. During that farewell meeting, “Diem assured him, as a personal favor, that no further repressive measures would be taken against the Buddhists.”

But at 6:00 A.M. on August 21, the day before the new ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, arrived in Saigon, Diem declared martial law. By that time, the army had already cordoned off the principal entrances and exits of major cities. Telephone communications were cut and commercial flights were banned from Saigon airport. Complete press censorship went into effect. Early in the morning and in direct violation of Diem’s promise to Nolting, army and police combat units assaulted Xa Loi pagoda, arrested the monks and nuns, and sealed it off. Other pagodas throughout Vietnam, though particularly in Saigon and Huế, similarly were raided, cordoned off, and some were destroyed. There were widespread reports of killings, violence, arrests, and beatings. Two monks, escaping from the police actions at the Xa Loi pagoda, sought and were granted refuge inside a U.S. aid mission in Saigon, prompting Vietnamese security services to demand that they be turned over. When American officials refused the demand, Vietnamese security services cordoned off the U.S. aid mission and initially refused to allow Americans to enter the building. (A few days later, three other monks obtained asylum inside the main embassy building.)

Beatings and detentions were widespread. The dean of the faculty of medicine at Saigon University was arrested, prompting 500 students from the faculties of medicine and pharmacy to boycott their classes, a tactic that American college students protesting the Vietnam war would not adopt until several years later.

Life magazine, one of the leading Cold War voices of anticommunism in the United States that had once praised Diem as the “miracle man of Asia,” turned on him with a vengeance after his crackdown on the Buddhist pagodas. In Life’s sister magazine, Time, gone was the ambivalence in its cover story on Madame Nhu from only two weeks earlier. It reported that the crackdown was brutal... and it aroused a strong new wave of sympathy for the Buddhists. It also put U.S. policy in South Viet Nam, which involves the lives and safety of 14,000 U.S. troops, into an agonizing dilemma... [By] his move against the Buddhist monks, who have the growing support of the country’s vast Buddhist majority, Roman Catholic Diem may finally have shattered his own political usefulness.

Though now strongly criticizing Diem for his intransigence and brutality, Time did not engage in any reflection on the fact that it was American decisionmakers, ignorant of Vietnam, who decided in the first place to install Diem on the Vietnamese throne as the ideal cold warrior to battle communism in just the way that Americans thought it should be fought in Vietnam. Nor did Time consider the
fact that it was the Vietnamese who were now suffering the consequences of the American decision to fight the Cold War in the jungles of Asia.

Hours after the pagodas were seized, but on the same day in Washington, President Kennedy was advised in his morning intelligence briefing that:

a. Diem’s regime seems determined to repress forcefully the rising Buddhist agitation, despite strong advice from US representatives and an urgent plea from Saigon’s ambassador to Washington.

b. Police and army personnel raided Buddhist pagodas in Saigon and Hué yesterday using arms, grenades and tear gas.

c. A number of Buddhists were reported killed or wounded, and many others were arrested. The fate of key Buddhist leaders is not yet known.

d. Martial law has been declared throughout the country, and all communications are in military hands.

e. These harsh measures may only serve to further alienate the Vietnamese public and will further damage Diem’s image throughout the world.

f. Some senior Vietnamese officers may have agreed with this action as necessary to prevent the spread of unrest. However, we know little of the attitude of junior officers and enlisted men, most of whom are Buddhists, or how they would react if ordered to quell popular disturbances.204

At 7:00 that night in Washington, the person responsible for developing counter-insurgency strategy in Vietnam, Major General V.H. Krulak, convened a task force for the Joint Chiefs of Staff that recommended that the United States use its full pressure to convince the government of Vietnam to "end the religious crisis" and direct its efforts instead against the Viet Cong. In order to placate the Vietnamese population and calm the turbulence, it also urged the embassy to "get Madame Nhu out of the country." Although it was Diem and Nhu who had made the martial law decisions, their American allies did not yet know that. At the State Department, on the opposite side of the Potomac River, officials were scrambling to try to determine exactly who was actually in power in Vietnam. Was it Diem? Was it Nhu? Was it the generals?

For the Buddhists of Vietnam, August 21 was the day that the government directly and unequivocally declared war on their sacred religious sites and on their religion. The day after martial law was declared, Tran Van Chuong, South Vietnam’s ambassador to Washington (and the father of Mme. Nhu), resigned the position he had held for nine years in protest against his own government. In his cable to Diem, announcing his resignation, the ambassador said: "This difficult war will only be won by the reconciliation and sincere union in liberty of all anti-Communist Vietnamese forces and by the utilization of all available talents and not by copying the tactics of totalitarian regimes."205 His wife, the Vietnamese representative to the United Nations and Mme. Nhu’s mother, resigned shortly thereafter.

The resignations in protest of the government that began with the 47 faculty members in Hué the previous Saturday continued. In Saigon, the South
Vietnamese foreign minister, Vu Van Mau, a Buddhist, also resigned in protest and shaved his head in penance. Vietnam’s Buddhist neighbor, Cambodia, broke diplomatic relations shortly thereafter. The actions against the pagodas, carried out in most cases by elite forces loyal to Diem, not only turned monks, peasants, and students against the regime but many within the army as well. The majority of soldiers in the Vietnamese army were Buddhists, whether nominally or actively, and many, perhaps most, were horrified by what was generally perceived as an army assault against their own religion. Some soldiers later recounted how their family members ostracized them even over their protests that they had had nothing to do personally with the assaults on the pagodas. The State Department in Washington quickly concluded that Nhu had ordered the military assaults on the pagodas with purpose of “placing the onus on [the] military in the eyes of [the] world and [the] Vietnamese people.”206

American personnel on the ground in Vietnam were dismayed by the actions that they perceived as having been directed at the Buddhist majority at the time that the government should have been focusing its efforts on countering the communist insurgency.207 Summing up recent events, David Halberstam of the New York Times wrote on August 25 that the indifference that had originally greeted the arrival of Diem had turned into “blunt hatred.” Close observers in Vietnam have seen the bitter faces of many students [and] have watched the growing popularity of the Buddhist cause—growing not so much on religious grounds, but because in this closed society it provided at least an outlet for feelings about the Government [that thinks it] can harness its people. Rather, this Government simply divides the people a little more each day.208

In contrast with the grinding poverty and alienation of the majority of South Vietnamese, who increasingly looked to Buddhism as a way of defining themselves in opposition to the government, there was a parallel society, comprising Vietnam’s elite, that had a “tendency to settle into a disengaged life in Saigon, living well in a luxury economy largely propped up through American aid.”209 This parallel universe was financed by the one-million-dollar-a-day infusion of funds by the United States in support of its 13,000 advisers and soldiers who were now based in Vietnam.210

Shortly after the declaration of martial law, President Kennedy sent Secretary of Defense McNamara and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Maxwell Taylor on a fact-finding mission to Vietnam. Upon their return to Washington on October 2, the McNamara-Taylor report to the president concluded that although there had been significant military progress against the communist insurgency, the principal obstacle to success was now the deteriorating political situation heightened by the Buddhist crisis.211 Immediately following their visit, two more Buddhists immolated themselves. With at least the tacit agreement of the American government, if not its actual encouragement, the South Vietnamese military staged a successful coup against Diem that began at approximately 2:00 P.M.
Saigon time, November 1, 1963. With the presidential palace surrounded, Diem and Nhu fled through an underground tunnel that exited near a Catholic Church in the Chinese quarter of Saigon. Though the exact details of their last 12 hours are in some dispute, the brothers attended Catholic mass the next morning, November 2, and were seized moments after leaving the church. Their hands were tied behind their backs and then they were shoved into an awaiting armored personnel carrier in which they were shot minutes later at point blank range.

Attending Roman Catholic mass in Buddhist Vietnam was the last sentient act performed by America’s Miracle Man in Asia. The Vietnamese, who had “stayed at home” when American-backed Diem arrived in Saigon in 1954, responded differently upon hearing news of his murder. “In Saigon, jubilant crowds smashed statues of Diem, danced in the streets, and covered ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] with garlands of flowers.”

Epilogue: The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the American Escalation in Vietnam

In July 1965, when Undersecretary of State George W. “Ball warned that it might take as many as a half million troops, [Secretary of Defense] McNamara dismissed the figure as ‘outrageous.’”

By 1968, the number of U.S. combat troops in Vietnam surpassed a half million.

—George C. Herring

I would just say this: no one could be more bitterly opposed to ever getting the United States involved in a hot war in that region than I am; consequently, every move that I authorize is calculated, as far as humans can do it, to make certain that that does not happen.

—President Dwight D. Eisenhower
February 10, 1954

Following the assassinations of Presidents Diem and Kennedy within three weeks of each other in November 1963, the new American president, Lyndon Baines Johnson, decided to reinvigorate the American approach to fighting communism in Vietnam. Ignoring the 1954 warnings issued by then-President Eisenhower and then-Senator Kennedy—that American troops should not fight a ground war in Asia—the president from Texas, who unlike his predecessors had not fought in World War II, decided to show the world that the U.S. military could defeat a barefoot and ragtag communist insurgency led by the wispy-bearded Ho Chi Minh. President Kennedy’s planned (but never implemented) withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam was scrapped.

In August 1964, three months before the November elections that pitted Johnson against Senator Barry Goldwater (who was demanding that America show greater military resolve in the struggle against communism), an “incident” occurred in the Gulf of Tonkin off the Vietnamese coast. In what is now known
to have been either intentionally false or highly misleading representations, President Johnson declared that North Vietnamese gun boats had deliberately attacked U.S. naval vessels in international waters. President Johnson quickly obtained from a compliant Congress a joint resolution on August 7, 1964, granting him authority “to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” Senators uttered stirring words about insults to the American flag before voting 98-2 to give the president the authority he sought that would allow for a military buildup. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution served as the legal authorization for the subsequent massive buildup of U.S. forces the following year and led directly to a full-scale American war in Indochina.\textsuperscript{218}

During the Congressional hearings on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, a congressman asked Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara to explain what had happened to change the American policy from one of optimism in 1963—where it was suggested that the war might be over by Christmas—to one that anticipated a massive military buildup following 1964. Secretary McNamara explained the turning point in South Vietnam as follows:

\begin{quote}
The period, December 1961, through the summer of 1963 was a period of great progress within South Vietnam, in countering the effort of the Viet Cong to overthrow that government. However, starting in May, 1963, you will recall, a series of religious riots developed, controversy within the country developed, leading eventually upon November 2nd to the overthrow of the Diem government.\textsuperscript{219}
\end{quote}

Thus, according to Secretary of Defense McNamara, the turning point in Vietnam, with the resulting need for massive American military involvement, began when security forces attacked people for displaying flags on the Buddha’s birthday. It was his religion that helped bring Diem to power and religion that helped bring him down.

In 1965, President Johnson sent the first declared combat troops to Vietnam to participate in offensive operations. The full-scale American war in Vietnam began in late February and early March 1965, following Johnson’s landslide win in November 1964.\textsuperscript{220} The leading religious figure to support President Johnson’s escalation of the war in Vietnam, Cardinal Spellman, was the same man who had first recommended Diem to American government officials in the early 1950s. “Spellman, more than any other churchman, was willing to proclaim Johnson’s crusade a moral one.”\textsuperscript{221} Within three years, the number of American troops surpassed the 500,000 mark, and Spellman remained a steadfast supporter of the war until his death in 1967. By that time, however, other Catholic religious leaders, along with many other religious leaders, had begun to protest what they described as the immorality of the war in Vietnam.

More than 58,000 Americans lost their lives in Vietnam, and between one and two million Vietnamese died. In this conflict, described as “America’s longest war,” the United States spent more than $165 billion. The war left more than 350,000 Americans wounded and added 2.7 million veterans to the rolls.\textsuperscript{222}
These enormous sacrifices by American soldiers nevertheless pale in comparison to the suffering incurred by the Vietnamese, who witnessed the deaths of somewhere between two and four million people. Their land was bombed, defoliated, mined, and napaled.223 “The United States sprayed 20 million gallons of herbicides and defoliants, including Agent Orange, on about 14 percent of southern Vietnam, and an estimated 1 million Vietnamese, including as many as 150,000 children, suffer from birth defects, miscarriages, and various illnesses possibly attributable to the chemicals. An estimated 3.5 million land mines still litter the countryside.”224 Untold numbers of Vietnamese who supported the United States were subjected by their victorious co-nationals to “reeducation.” Those considered to be uneducable were imprisoned or executed.

The 25-year American military effort to prevent South Vietnam from succumbing to communism came to an abrupt end on April 30, 1975, when Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops entered Saigon and Americans hastily evacuated the Saigon embassy by helicopter.

Exactly 25 years after the 1975 evacuation, and 50 years from the beginning of its military involvement, the United States of America signed an agreement with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam that gave the communist country the status of “most favored nation.”225 The U.S. embassy in Hanoi now actively promotes American trade and business relations in communist Vietnam.226 American officials frequently visit the country and discuss improving relations with the country that it once declared to be a threat to national security interests and to the free world. Americans are now free to travel throughout the country and may cross the 17th parallel without difficulty. The United States of America is now officially at peace with the country of Vietnam, even if it is not at peace with itself about Vietnam.
Conclusion: The Lessons of History

We have a lot of distinguished guests here today—members of Congress, military leaders, captains of industry.... It is fitting that we gather in prayer, because we recognize a prayerful nation is a stronger nation. (Applause.)

—President George W. Bush
National Prayer Breakfast, February 7, 2008

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

—Jesus
Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:5–6, RSV)

When addressing the last National Prayer Breakfast of his administration in February 2008, President George W. Bush tied together the three elements of the American National Religion just as had President Eisenhower who launched the tradition 56 years earlier. With a combination of good-old-boy jocularity, homespun English, and praise for the power of prayer, President Bush declared to his elite audience:

Laura and I are honored to join you all here for the 56th National Prayer Breakfast. A lot of reasons to pray, and one of course, is to strengthen us against temptation, particularly this morning—from temptation to stay in bed. (Laughter.)

Obviously there’s a lot of prayerful people here. And I appreciate your warm welcome.

We have a lot of distinguished guests here today—members of Congress, military leaders, captains of industry.... It is fitting that we gather in prayer, because we recognize a prayerful nation is a stronger nation. (Applause.)

...Appreciate the distinguished dignitaries, all the members of my Cabinet—don’t linger, get back to work. (Laughter.)
Admiral, thank you for your leadership. Always proud to be with the members of the United States military.

Every President since Dwight Eisenhower has attended the National Prayer Breakfast—and I am really proud to carry on that tradition.

I believe in the power of prayer, because I have felt it in my own life. Prayer has strengthened me in times of personal challenge. It has helped me meet the challenges of the presidency. I understand now clearly the story of the calm in the rough seas. And so at this final prayer breakfast as your President, I thank you for your prayers, and I thank our people all across America for their prayers. And I ask you not to stop in the year ahead. We have so much work to do for our country, and with the help of the Almighty, we will build a freer world—and a safer, more hopeful, more noble America.

God bless. (Applause.)

The prayer breakfast audience laughed appreciatively when the president of the United States jokingly singled out resting in bed too long as a temptation and applauded him warmly when he acknowledged the combined presence of the American military, politicians, captains of industry, and God. President Bush, like President Eisenhower at the first Presidential Prayer Breakfast, did not call upon the prestigious group of religious and political leaders to repent or to give all that they had to the poor (Matthew 19:21), and he certainly did not suggest that they should love their enemies and do good to those who hate them (Luke 6:35; Matthew 5:44). The president praised prayer, not because it made him a more introspective or loving human being but because it had “strengthened” him in times of “personal challenge” and because it helped him “meet the challenges of the presidency.” He asked for the prayers of the American people, not to make him a more spiritual person, but to help make him a stronger person.

Nor is God invoked by the president for the purpose of saving souls. Rather, it is “with the help of the Almighty” that America will be able to build a “freer world” and a “safer, more hopeful, more noble America.” President Bush’s God “helps those that help themselves.” This God that President Bush invokes is not the one found in the Holy Bible but the one found in Benjamin Franklin’s Poor Richard’s Almanack of 1736. In appreciation for his observations about the role of God, the assembled political and religious leaders applauded the commander-in-chief’s solicitation of the Almighty to help make the United States “safer” and “more noble.”

Unlike Eisenhower, who entered his presidency unbaptized and who spoke of religion principally as it related to politics, President George W. Bush had, for years, directly and intentionally spoken about his personal religious faith. In his campaign autobiography, A Charge to Keep, the future president described how the Reverend Billy Graham helped set him right with God and “planted a mustard seed in my soul.” During a televised debate in Iowa in 2000, candidate Bush was asked to identify his “favorite political philosopher.” The candidate’s response was immediate and forthright: “Christ, because he changed my heart.” Many observers believe that this spontaneous answer helped galvanize the
support of Christian conservatives because they were pleased to hear a politician invoke Christ’s name without any embarrassment. They seem not to have noticed nor to have been troubled by the candidate’s identification of Christ as a “political philosopher” rather than as the “Son of God” or the “Savior of the World.”

* * * *

The three elements of the “American National Religion”—governmental theism, a military second to none, and capitalism as freedom—are sufficiently accepted across the political spectrum that even those political figures who might question them privately are reluctant to challenge them publicly. One segment of the American public that has accepted these three elements with particular enthusiasm has been the community that has been labeled (albeit simplistically) as the “religious right.” From the beginning of the twentieth century through the early 1950s, the mainline churches and the National Council of Churches (and its predecessor the Federal Council of Churches) were often treated by the media as the voice of religion in America. This gradually began to change. By the late 1970s through the first years of the twentieth century, the media was more likely to solicit the opinion of “religion” from people such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Ralph Reed, James Dobson, Richard Land, or D. James Kennedy or institutions such as the Southern Baptist Convention, the Christian Coalition, and the Moral Majority. They were seen as representing people who attended church most frequently and who took the Bible most seriously and who sought a greater voice for religion in the public square and in political affairs. It was they who described themselves as “values voters” and who spoke in favor of “biblical values,” “traditional values,” “Godly values,” and against moral relativism, humanism, and secularism. Logic would have suggested that such leaders would have been those who would have been most troubled by language that substituted the biblical God for the political United States and that confused the roles of politicians and prophets. But, to the contrary, Christian conservatives were particularly enthusiastic supporters of the Bush candidacy and the Bush presidency that boldly praised religion and “faith-based initiatives.”

In December 2001, following the attacks of September 11, the conservative Christian community became even more avid supporters of President George Bush. In an article that fully reflected the spirit of the time but that seems increasingly peculiar as time passes, White House reporter Dana Milbank described the support of religious conservatives for President Bush. Milbank wrote matter-of-factly about what at that time seemed to be obvious rather than extraordinary: the president was the leader of Christian conservatives and the majority of Evangelicals in the United States.

For the first time since religious conservatives became a modern political movement, the president of the United States has become the movement’s de facto leader—a status even Ronald Reagan, though admired by religious conservatives, never earned. Christian publications, radio and television shower Bush with praise,
while preachers from the pulpit treat his leadership as an act of providence. A procession of religious leaders who have met with him testify to his faith, while Web sites encourage people to fast and pray for the president.

“I think [Pat] Robertson stepped down [as President of the Christian Coalition] because the position has already been filled,” said Gary Bauer, a religious conservative who challenged Bush in the Republican primary. Bush “is that leader right now. There was already a great deal of identification with the president before 9-11 in the world of the Christian right, and the nature of this war is such that it’s heightened the sense that a man of God is in the White House.”

Ralph Reed, who once led the Christian Coalition and now is chairman of the Georgia GOP, notes that the religious conservative movement “no longer plays the institutional role it once did,” in part because it succeeded in electing Bush and other friendly leaders. “You’re no longer throwing rocks at the building; you’re in the building.”

Conservative Christians tend to view Bush’s recent success as part of a divine plan. “I’ve heard a lot of ‘God knew something we didn’t,’ ” Reed said. “In the evangelical mind, the notion of an omniscient God is central to their theology. He had a knowledge nobody else had: He knew George Bush had the ability to lead in this compelling way.”

Still, some of those around Bush say they have a sense that a higher purpose is involved. “I think President Bush is God’s man at this hour, and I say this with a great sense of humility,” [said] Bush aide Tim Goeglein.4

Years later, it became clear that the Iraq invasion of 2003 did not produce the prophesied crowds of grateful Iraqis welcoming their American liberators, or that the promised “weapons of mass destruction” in fact existed, or that the “Mission Accomplished” banner correctly described a war that was over. The triumphal and effusive language from religious conservatives that was boastfully uttered at the end of 2001 was extinct by the end of the Bush administration. The smug words of 2001 were forgotten by 2008.

Curiously, despite the many books and articles that have been written about George W. Bush and his religious inclinations, none provides any in-depth explanation about his actual beliefs beyond the very general declarations that he believes in God, that salvation comes through Christ, that Christ changed his heart, that there is power in prayer, and that the Bible is a holy book that should be read daily. Beyond such very general confessions—regardless of how sincere they might be—George Bush revealed almost nothing to his strongest supporters about his actual religious beliefs. Nevertheless, those who were most vocal about the importance of Christianity were those who seem to have been the least troubled by the absence of any religious substance beyond the very public declarations about the importance of God and religion. This divorce between the religious fervor for a politician and the absence of religious substance is not unlike that of the young and enthusiastic Billy Graham who paid a visit to General Eisenhower at SHAPE headquarters in 1952. Although Graham did not identify any particular religious beliefs of the unbaptized general who confessed that he had not attended church even in wartime, this did not dissuade the enthusiastic
evangelist from becoming a very fervent supporter. In Eisenhower’s first Presidential Prayer Breakfast event, when the general made statements more in alignment with the American National Religion than with the religion inside the covers of the Holy Bible, Graham did not object. He too applauded.

While Dwight Eisenhower and George W. Bush explained little about their religious beliefs, they said a great deal about their beliefs about the three elements of the American National Religion. This prompts the inevitable question: were religious conservatives seduced into supporting Eisenhower and Bush because of the presidents’ statements about the American National Religion, or did they correctly intuit a genuine religious seriousness and depth in the two men?

* * * *

The three elements of the American National Religion described in this book—governmental theism, a military that is second to none, and capitalism as freedom—have been an enduring part of a consensus ideology in the United States since the late 1940s. While the ideological roots underlying these elements certainly had antecedents, and while none was ever universally adopted, they came together as a consensus ideology that has largely remained unchallenged by major political figures since the early 1950s. Even at the time that they were subjected to their most serious opposition during the protest movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the challengers remained in the opposition and were never in a majority. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a decade after the end of the Cold War that gave birth to the consensus, these three elements continue largely as unchallenged bedrock values. More than a decade after the end of the Cold War, and prior to the economic crisis of 2008, presidential candidates and leading political figures of the two major political parties had not advocated a rethinking of these values.

**Governmental theism.** In 2002, almost 50 years after President Eisenhower described the addition of “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance as a “spiritual weapon” in the American arsenal against communist atheism and 10 years after the final collapse of the Soviet Union, a Federal Court of Appeals decided that the addition of the words “under God” violated the U.S. Constitution. The response of politicians to the court’s ruling was immediate and harsh. President George W. Bush called the decision “ridiculous” and the senate majority leader, Democrat Tom Daschle, called it “nuts.” Democratic Senator Byrd, who prided himself as being an authority on the Constitution, said that any judge making such a decision was “stupid” and should be “blackballed.” Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton announced from the Senate floor that she was “surprised and offended” by the decision that “sought to undermine one of the bedrock values of our democracy, that we are indeed ‘one nation under God,’ as embodied in the Pledge of Allegiance.” Catching the spirit of the post-September 11 world, another representative declared that Congress must “respond to this outrageous decision and proclaim that these United States are united against terrorism,
united against this decision, and united under God.”9 Within 24 hours after the court decision was announced, and possibly before any member of Congress had actually read the decision, both houses of the U.S. Congress had put aside their other pressing business and passed resolutions reaffirming the importance of God in the Pledge. In the immediately following years, Congress has enacted several new laws to reaffirm and to protect the Pledge with its divine addition.

Politicians long after the 1950s continue not only to praise prayers, but to praise themselves for praying. In 1992, President George H.W. Bush, speaking at yet another a prayer breakfast in Houston, made sure that his audience understood how important God and prayer were not only to him personally, but to every president.

You cannot be President without believing in God. We say our prayers every night. When we sit in that historic family dining room on the second floor of the White House, we say the blessing before our meals. Today I ask for your prayers, not for the campaign that we’re in but prayers asking God to give those of us in leadership positions and give me as President the strength to do what is right, the courage to lead this, the greatest nation on the face of the Earth, the United States of America, one Nation under God.10

By several measures, including public opinion surveys about belief in God and in weekly church attendance statistics, the United States consistently outranks European countries as being the most religious country in the industrialized world. While Americans typically see religion as playing a constructive role in public affairs and in foreign policy, from the outside it is frequently seen as less than benign. One European who is a particularly well-informed observer of American religion, Professor Sebastien Fath, notes that the French press, for example, has identified religion as the major cleavage between the United States and Europe.11 The media outside the United States decries in alarmist terms the influence that religious groups and individuals—Evangelical Christians, Fundamentalists, and Jews—supposedly have over policymakers.12 In French bookstores, sections on the United States are filled with books decrying the dangerous influence of religion on American politics. This was particularly true during the administration of George W. Bush, who was widely seen as being either a religious zealot or a person who was unduly influenced by religious zealots. He was routinely linked with the best-known figures of the religious right, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, and he was sometimes described as believing that he received a divine calling from God to invade Iraq in 2003.

A military second to none. Long after the collapse of the Soviet Union, American politicians continue to insist on a “military second to none” and no leading political figure challenges this notion. The talk about a “peace dividend” following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 evaporated by 1992, as the United States saw other dragons to be slain. In the twenty-first century, the United States in fact spends approximately the same amount of money on its military as does the rest of the world combined.13 The United States has more aircraft carriers
in its service than do all other countries of the world combined. The United States has more military bases outside of its home territory than do all other countries of the world combined. The United States has more nuclear weapons in its possession than do all other countries of the world combined. The United States’ Sixth Fleet is permanently based in the Mediterranean. No Mediterranean country has a fleet permanently based in the Caribbean. Despite these massive expenditures by the American taxpayers to support the world’s largest military force, virtually no major political figure—Republican or Democrat—publicly questions whether the United States is spending significantly too much money on the military, nor whether the huge American military makes the United States more likely to become involved in wars. No leading political figure of either major party advocates a significant cutback in American military expenditures. Indeed, any candidate for political office who questioned seriously the appropriateness of these massive expenditures would immediately be labeled “soft on defense” or “soft on national security.”

At the same time that the United States is the world’s largest importer of consumer goods, it is also the world’s largest exporter of lethal weapons. Between 1977 and 2006, the United States exported almost as many weapons as the next four highest countries in the world combined (Russia-USSR, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany). The United States—idealized by its leaders as being a “religious country” and a “peaceful country”—not only possesses a strong military force, it frequently uses it. The homeland territory of the United States itself has rarely been attacked or invaded by other countries, with the notable exceptions of the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican invasion of Texas, and Pearl Harbor being the most obvious examples. While the attacks of September 11, 2001 were not by a foreign country, the shock to Americans was probably the equivalent as if they had been. But apart from these few and important exceptions, the United States has largely not experienced invasions from abroad and certainly nothing compared to those experienced by Germany, France, Poland, Russia, and China. There are dozens of countries, however, that have been invaded by the United States (for good reasons or bad), subjected to bombing by the U.S. military, or whose governments were overthrown by American clandestine services. In the words of Walter Russell Mead: “It isn’t fashionable to say so, but the United States of America is the most dangerous military power in the history of the world.”

Since the end of World War II, the American military engaged in major combat operations in, among other countries, Korea (North and South), Vietnam (North and South), Laos, Cambodia, Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, the Balkans, Grenada, Panama, Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. American military and intelligence forces have been involved directly in (or in complicity with) successful coups toppling governments in Iran (Mossadegh, 1953), the Congo (Lumumba), Indonesia (1965), Guatemala (Arbenz, 1954), Chile (Allende, 1973), and Vietnam (Diem, 1963). The United States has sent arms in support of dictatorial regimes that actively suppressed democratic movements, freedom of the press, and religious freedom in, among other countries: Iran
(Shah Pahlevi), El Salvador, Iraq (Saddam Hussein against Iran), Saudi Arabia, South Korea (Park Chung Hee), Cuba (Batista), Greece (George Papadopoulos), Taiwan (Chang Kai-shek), Turkey, Egypt, Argentina (Augosto Pinochet), Guatemala (Efrain Rios Montt), Vietnam (Ngo Dinh Diem), Nicaragua (Anastasio Somoza), Paraguay (Alfredo Stroessner), the Dominican Republic (Rafael Trujillo), South Africa (apartheid regimes), Uzbekistan (Islam Karimov), and the Philippines (Ferdinand Marcos). American military and intelligence services attempted to overthrow Castro in the Bay of Pigs (1962) and were involved in several unsuccessful assassination attempts of the Cuban leader. The United States also attempted to use surrogates to overthrow the Sandinista government of Nicaragua. The only country that even remotely approached the record of the United States’ military interventions in foreign countries following World War II was the Soviet Union, which ceased to exist in 1991.

Three years after the beginning of the Second Gulf War, when American troops had been unable to pacify the country and after there had been reports of abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison and after published reports concluded that some American soldiers had intentionally killed innocent Iraqi civilians, the public continued to have high confidence in the military.\(^{17}\) American soldiers are frequently described as America’s best and America’s bravest and are thought of as the people among us who defend the country’s freedoms in a dangerous world. When reports surfaced of American soldiers committing abuses on civilians, the overwhelming public reaction was to believe that it is not possible that American troops could have committed atrocities. If evidence of such abuse emerges, whether in My Lai in Vietnam or Haditha in Iraq, both the public and the military are often unwilling to acknowledge fully that a serious breakdown occurred, and there is little public clamor to investigate the atrocities or hold accountable those who committed them. Even after soldiers are found guilty of the intentional murder of innocent civilians, they are given light sentences followed by presidential pardons. When there is irrefutable proof of abuse, such as the photographs documenting the humiliating treatment of Iraqi prisoners by their American guards at Abu Ghraib, the typical reaction was to attribute the abuses to “a few bad apples” rather than to find the military as an institution responsible for a failure to train and supervise its soldiers or for the chain-of-command to be held accountable.\(^ {18}\) After the first shocking photographs of the Abu Ghraib abuses were released to the public, it was learned that there were additional photographs that depicted even more shocking abuses. But shortly after a few members of Congress observed the additional photographic and videotaped evidence and expressed their disgust, public interest in learning the truth evaporated and there was no public demand for the truth to come out. The smallest of peccadilloes of political candidates (and even their supporters) are repeatedly broadcast in the media and are vociferously denounced by their opponents and by pundits, but the killing of innocent civilians by the American military garners little interest. Politicians conduct thorough “negative research” on their political opponents but scarcely investigate the military.
Probably the most pointed and important criticism on the role of the military in American public life was delivered by none other than retiring president and former general Dwight D. Eisenhower, when he warned Americans in his parting message about the dangers of the “military-industrial complex.” It also had been Eisenhower who warned, initially, that the U.S. combat soldiers should not be sent to fight in Vietnam. (Eisenhower did, however, later support Lyndon Johnson’s escalation of the Vietnam War.) But Eisenhower’s immediate successor, John Kennedy, did not take this message to heart, nor did his successor, Richard Nixon. Indeed, those who take Eisenhower’s message most seriously and those who quote him the most often are the Cassandras of the political left who place Eisenhower’s warning as an epigraph at the beginning of their policy papers, articles, and books that try to illustrate the pervasiveness of the ties among the military, international corporations, and the political class. However true (or false) their warnings might be, they are taken seriously only by a very small minority of the American population.

The time that the role of the American military received its longest, largest, and most sustained attack was during the last eight years of the Vietnam War (1967–1975). In the late 1960s, American college campus erupted in antiwar protests. Some protestors burnt draft cards and others burnt government records. The military and National Guard were called up inside the United States to help control domestic protests against the military. Major candidates for political office openly called for withdrawal from the war in Vietnam and for a reduction in American military power. In 1968, the sitting president of the United States was attacked within his own party by the brother of Johnson’s predecessor. At the Democratic National Convention in Chicago that year, antiwar and antimilitary protestors loudly challenged the legitimacy of the political process both inside and outside the convention center. At no other time since 1947 was the military component of the American National Religion under such sustained assault. And yet even in that year, 1968, the Democratic Party ultimately nominated the sitting vice president, Hubert Humphrey, a man closely tied to the Johnson administration’s war effort. And Humphrey was beaten in the election by one of the original cold warriors, Richard Nixon, who made as a major theme of his successful campaign an attack on those who questioned the role of the military, public piety, and the capitalist system. Even when challenged in 1968 by the most sustained assault since its birth, the American National Religion prevailed and the losers of that battle continue to be reviled.

Of course the “Sixties” did not end in the sixties and the Vietnam antiwar movement did not end with the election of Richard Nixon in 1968 or his re-election in 1972. Opposition to the Vietnam War continued as the fighting continued and as the quagmire deepened. The next, and last, challenge to the military-industrial complex in a presidential election year took place in 1972 when President Nixon (who had sat out World War II) was challenged by peace candidate Senator George McGovern (a bomber pilot in World War II). Although Nixon had spent the war years working in the Office of Price Controls in
Washington, D.C. (strangely enough in the company of economist John Kenneth Galbraith), the prowar candidate without military experience defeated the antiwar candidate who had served his country in battle. Even though Nixon was under increasing suspicion about his role in the Watergate affair, he was so successful in painting McGovern as an appeaser who was soft on defense that he demolished the war veteran in the electoral college and captured every state except Massachusetts. Thereafter, Democrats who took positions against war resolutions, invasions, or increases in military spending were inevitably labeled “McGovernites” by their opponents, and those who are so described inevitably will run from the label rather than embrace the man who served his country honorably in war and in peace. Indeed, in election after election, it is typically more important for a candidate to call for more military spending and for more confrontational military policies rather than actually to have served in the military.

While the majority of Americans and their politicians speak with proud self-satisfaction about their country’s peaceful character and the importance it places on religion, others who look at the country from outside are likely to see the United States and its people quite differently. Many foreign observers see the United States first through the lens of popular American films, where it might be imagined (however incorrectly) that the country is filled with gangs and gangsters, criminals, Mafiosi, cowboys, soldiers, spies, action heroes, policemen, vigilantes—and lawyers. The successful American blockbuster films, distributed widely throughout the world, are less likely to show American thinkers probing the deep psychological workings of the human condition and more likely to show car chases, shootouts, massive explosions, and the destruction of cities and even worlds. Though such violent films may not depict the true American character, they perpetuate the stereotype.

Foreigners are less likely to believe that Americans are peaceful and slow to anger and more likely to see them as aspiring terminators and Rambos with a particular fondness for violence. An American journalist who had long lived abroad wrote early in 2001: “Europeans have long been horrified by America’s embrace of gun rights, our incidence of violent crime, our infant mortality among the poor [the quantity of our] taxpayer dollars to equip a military.”19 The strong popular support for capital punishment is taken as yet another indication of Americans’ penchant for violence rather than any peacefulness or slowness to anger. Pending executions of criminals in America “are often carefully followed” in the European press “as examples of barbarism.”20 In a study comparing the attitudes of citizens of 16 different countries about the American people, more than half of the people in 12 of the 16 countries believe that the word “violent” fairly describes the American people.21 In the United States, the rate of violent crime, fueled by the abundance of easily accessible firearms and drugs, exceeds that of all other industrialized countries. This similarly leads to a higher rate of incarceration and capital punishment in the United States than in any other industrialized society. Although many of these attitudes hardened after the launching of the Second Gulf War in 2003, the opinions have long been
in place. Before George W. Bush was even inaugurated, the Washington bureau chief of London’s *Guardian* newspaper summarized attitudes of the British towards the incoming president: “He is a defender of the gun culture. He was the governor of the leading death penalty state. He is an advocate of the most far-reaching versions of national missile defense.”

Whereas the majority of Americans are likely to think of their armed forces as playing a constructive and peacemaking role in world affairs, others have a strikingly different perspective. In one worldwide survey, two-thirds of the respondents reported that the American military presence in the Middle East does more harm than good. “Majorities in 13 out of 15 publics polled say that the United States is ‘playing the role of world policeman more than it should be.’”

Majorities in 10 out of 15 countries believe that the United States cannot be trusted to “act responsibly in the world.” In a Pew 16-country survey, the majority in every country except the United States believed that it would be better for the world if there were another military power to rival the United States. Even during the Clinton administration, which was relatively popular abroad, Secretary of State Albright’s description of the United States as the “‘indispensable’ nation”—[struck] a threatening chord.”

Andrew J. Bacevich, a retired colonel in the U.S. Army who subsequently became a historian of the American military, has been sharply critical of the dominant American ideology—shared by virtually all leading Republicans and Democratic politicians—that presumes that an American military that is unrivaled in the world makes the world safer and more peaceful. “It would be wrong to argue that we have been a peaceful people. We have not been a peaceful people. ....After the Cold War—again, with remarkably little debate, with remarkably little discussion of [what are] the implications of the course upon which we are embarking—what we did was to commit ourselves to perpetual military supremacy.”

Nelson Mandela, the Nobel Prize laureate who put aside his own bitter experiences to bring about reconciliation in his native South Africa, asserted in 2002 that “the attitude of the United States of America is a threat to world peace.” The famous Cold War spy novelist, John le Carré, expressed sentiments widely shared among foreign intellectuals during the buildup to the 2003 war in Iraq. Sounding distinctly unlike the ironic characters of his novels, le Carré sputtered:

The religious cant that will send American troops into battle is perhaps the most sickening aspect of this surreal war-to-be. Bush has an arm-lock on God. And God has very particular political opinions. God appointed America to save the world in any way that suits America. God appointed Israel to be the nexus of America’s Middle Eastern policy, and anyone who wants to mess with that idea is a) anti-Semitic, b) anti-American, c) with the enemy, and d) a terrorist....

To be a member of the team you must also believe in Absolute Good and Absolute Evil, and Bush, with a lot of help from his friends, family and God, is there to tell us which is which. What Bush won’t tell us is the truth about why we’re going to war.
Whereas Americans were understandably shocked by the deaths of more than 2,000 civilians on September 11, 2001, Americans rarely pause to imagine how the deaths of innocent civilians (sometimes identified as “collateral damage”) caused by the American military might provoke an understandably shocked reaction by other peoples—and certainly candidates for high political office in the United States typically do not appeal to Americans to take account of the consequences of U.S. military actions abroad. It is for such reasons that Americans’ self-perception of being a “peaceful people” rings so hollow outside of the United States. Professor Simon Schama, the British historian, after having lived and taught in the United States for more than 20 years, found that “what European intellectuals even now find most repugnant...is American sanctimoniousness, the habit of dressing the business of power in the garb of piety.”

Belief in a “moral military” and a “military second to none” is so fully engrained that a fundamental questioning of it is not undertaken by the politically powerful regardless of political party.

Capitalism as freedom. Prior to the economic crisis of 2008, it was scarcely imaginable that a major political candidate in the United States in the twenty-first century would repudiate the term “capitalism” in the way that Herbert Hoover did in 1922 and 1934, or suggest, as did a religious leader in 1932, that “the present economic system as a whole is unchristian” because it is based on “greed.” Of course the American system, even during its peak deregulation eras, was never a pure “capitalist” or “laissez-faire” or “free-market” economy. There have been major and long-lasting governmental interferences in the free market, including notably the Pure Food and Drugs Act of 1906, the Securities Act of 1933, the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, and the creation of the Social Security program (the Old Age Survivors and Disability Insurance) in 1935—as well as a host of other legislation during the New Deal. The era of the American National Religion has also seen major governmental interferences in the marketplace, including perhaps most notably the creation of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965 and the Wall Street bailout of 2008. (Although Medicare and Medicaid were deeply controversial when first enacted, they have become so engrained in the public life that few politicians now assault them head-on.) Nevertheless, with the exception of public education, governmental interferences in the marketplace typically pertain to “safety” issues and not “welfare” issues. (Tellingly, the word “welfare” itself—which has deeply humane roots—has become a pejorative term in the American lexicon and is often associated with “socialism” and “laziness.”) Thus the federal government regulates the safety of travel by air and rail, but is reluctant to fund public transportation itself. While subsidized public transportation does exist in the United States, when compared to other industrialized countries, the United States fares poorly.

At the same time that the United States has many of the best hospitals in the world and although American expenditures on health care on a per capital basis are among the highest in the world, it also has one of the worst health-care systems for the poor and unemployed of any of the industrialized countries in
the world. How does so much money produce such poor health care for the disad
tantaged? Among the many answers is the role that the “private” health insur-
ance industry plays in taking out its slice of the funds between patient and doctor.
The country of “religious people” has decided that it is necessary for their
government to have the best military hardware in the world but that it would be
immoral to have the best medical care in the world for their poor. Such fiscal
and moral priorities do not emerge from the pages of the Holy Bible or the
Sermon on the Mount, but they can easily be found in the speeches of proponents
of the American National Religion. Within the United States, it is more likely
that candidates for major political office will support increased government
surveillance of speech and private telephone communications than increased
government control over the ownership of firearms. Americans “understand” that
they must give up some of their privacy when using cell phones because terro-
rists also use cell phones. But they do not “understand” that they should relin-
quish their ability to buy guns because terrorists also buy guns. Why is the
right to own guns more deeply cherished than the right to quality medical care
for those who are the innocent victims of guns?

* * * *

Writing from his home in Los Angeles during the summer of 1956—in the
middle of the Eisenhower years—the novelist Aldous Huxley wrote an essay that
began with one of his most frequently quoted sentences: “That men do not learn
very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons of
history.” While history may have much to teach, its students—according to
Huxley—are very poor learners. The next sentences of Huxley’s essay are less
frequently cited, but they offer an insight into the middle of the 1950s when the
United States was building its military as a defense against Soviet aggression.

_Si vis pacem_, the Romans liked to say, _para bellum_—if you want peace prepare for
war. For the last few thousand years the rulers of all the world’s empires, kingdoms
and republics have acted upon this maxim—with the result...that every civilized
nation has spent about half of every century of its existence waging war with its
neighbors. But has mankind learned this lesson of history? The answer is emphati-
cally in the negative.

From the perspective of foreign observers, it is not necessarily seen as admi-
rable—or unrelated—that the United States ranks first among all industrialized
countries in church attendance, belief in God, the number of Bibles sold per cap-
ita, the murder rate, the rate of incarceration, the rate of executions, military
expenditures, the number of nuclear weapons possessed, the per capita owner-
ship of firearms, the largest national debt, the highest rate of per capita consumer
debt and per capita personal consumption, the most movies made, and among the
lowest in money spent per capita for public transportation, medical care for the
poor, and in unemployment benefits. The political classes and the population at
large do not add these up and ask if something is wrong. Rather, they praise the
city on a hill and invoke God’s blessing—on America.
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Appendix I

President Harry Truman’s 1951 Speech

Address at the Cornerstone Laying of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church
April 3, 1951

Dr. Docherty, ladies and gentlemen: Speaking of that foundation, Doctor, it’s too bad you didn’t have to listen to the laying of the foundation of the White House. It’s on the same sort of soil as your church is located. If you remember, they had to put a foundation under the Washington Monument because they didn’t start it right, for the very same reason that you had to put this foundation under your church. And I think we are told in the Scriptures that if we build our house on a rock, it will stand, even if we have to manufacture that rock.

It is a great privilege for me to be able to take part in this service. The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church has played an important part in the history of Washington. For almost 150 years a Presbyterian congregation has worshiped on or near this spot. During all that period, this church has preached the Christian message to this busy Capital City.

As you have remarked, Doctor, several of our Presidents worshiped here, and of course among them the most famous, Lincoln.

This new building demonstrates that you are still going forward in the same spirit which moved those early worshipers who first came to the swamps and woodland of this National Capital a century and a half ago. May you long continue in that same missionary spirit.

The essential mission of the church is to teach the moral law. We look to our churches, above all other agencies, to teach us the highest moral standards of right and wrong. We rely on the churches particularly to instill into our young people those moral ideals which are the basis of our free institutions.
This great Republic is founded on a firm foundation based on those very principles—the Constitution of the United States.

Religion is not an easy thing. It is not simply a comfort to those in trouble or a means of escaping from present difficulties, as some people today would have us believe.

Religion is not a negative thing. It is not merely a series of prohibitions against certain actions because they are wicked.

Our religion includes these elements. But it also includes much more. It is a positive force that impels us to affirmative action. We are under divine orders—not only to refrain from doing evil, but also to do good and to make this world a better place in which to live.

Every one of us should measure the actions of his daily life against this moral code which our religion gives us. Every one of us, according to the strength and wisdom God gives to him, should try his best every day to live up to these religious teachings.

More than this, religion should establish moral standards for the conduct of our whole Nation, at home and abroad. We should judge our achievements, as a nation, in the scales of right and wrong.

The democracy we cherish and our free institutions depend upon the observance of the moral code—in private life and also in public life. Selfishness and greed can tear this Nation apart, just as they have torn apart other great nations in the past. Our only defense against them is to follow those moral principles which have been handed down to us by our forefathers and which are enshrined today in churches such as this one.

We talk a lot these days about freedom—freedom for the individual and freedom among nations. Freedom for the human soul is, indeed, the most important principle of our civilization. We must always remember, however, that the freedom we are talking about is freedom based upon moral principles. Without a firm moral foundation, freedom degenerates quickly into selfishness and license. Unless men exercise their freedom in a just and honest way, within moral restraints, a free society can degenerate into anarchy. Then there will be freedom only for the rapacious and those who are stronger and more unscrupulous than the rank and file of the people.

If we neglect these truths, our whole society suffers.

This is readily apparent in the case of some of the evils that continually confront us. For example, when organized crime and vice run loose and are accepted and patronized by the people, they threaten our free institutions and debase our national life. These evils are clearly moral issues and our religious beliefs command us to fight against them.

It is not so readily apparent that moral issues are involved in some of the other evils we have been fighting against in this country. But it is nevertheless true that the evils of the sweatshop and the slum, the evils of needless disease and poverty, and the evils of social injustice are, at the bottom, moral issues. Such conditions
arise because men have neglected the moral law. They arise because men do not actually live up to the religious principles they profess to believe in. When we move to correct these evils, through our personal conduct, through community action, or through the Government, we are responding to the divine command—to the Golden Rule—which requires us to do unto others as we would be done by.

Of course, this is a struggle that is never finally won. There are many injustices in our country that need correction today, and need them badly. We must continue to weigh our national life in the scales of justice, and keep on striving to improve it.

In the world at large, as well as in our domestic affairs, we must apply moral standards to our national conduct. At the present time our Nation is engaged in a great effort to maintain justice and peace in the world. An essential feature of this effort is our program to build up the defenses of our country. There has never been a greater cause. There has never been a cause which had a stronger moral claim on all of us.

We are defending the religious principles upon which our Nation and our whole way of life are founded. We are defending the right to worship God—each as he sees fit according to his own conscience. We are defending the right to follow the precepts and the example which God has set for us. We are defending the right of people to gather together, all across our land, in churches such as this one. For the danger that threatens us in the world today is utterly and totally opposed to all these things. The international Communist movement is based on a fierce and terrible fanaticism. It denies the existence of God and, wherever it can, it stamps out the worship of God.

Our religious faith gives us the answer to the false beliefs of communism. Our faith shows us the way to create a society where man can find his greatest happiness under God. Surely, we can follow that faith with the same devotion and determination the Communists give to their godless creed.

That is what we must do. Our religion must live in our hearts, not as a set of dull rules learned by rote, but as a burning faith. Only such a faith—only a living allegiance to such a faith—can carry this country through the trials which are ahead of it.

This is a matter that comes home to every one of us. We have many different jobs to do and different parts to play in our country’s defense of its freedom and its beliefs. If each of us, wherever he may be—in a factory or a mine, on a farm or in an office, or in the home—if each of us does his best to help, we need have no fear of the outcome.

We should continue to ask ourselves whether we are responding to this cause with the moral conviction and the faith which it demands. Every day our newspapers tell us about the fighting in Korea. Our men there are making heroic sacrifices. They are fighting and suffering in an effort to prevent the tide of aggression from sweeping across the world. They are fighting to
prevent the much greater sacrifice and suffering which all of us would endure if another world war comes.

Although we read about these sacrifices in our newspapers every day, we have a tendency to think of the defense effort only in selfish terms—in terms of avoiding personal inconvenience or making some personal gain. Our young men are offering their lives for us in the hills of Korea—and yet too many of us are chiefly concerned over whether or not we can buy a television set next week, or make the profit we expect to make this year, or how we can turn the situation to our own selfish advantage.

This is a failure to understand the moral principles upon which our Nation is founded. This is a faltering in our allegiance to the moral faith we have inherited from our fathers.

If we truly believe in God, we ought to ask ourselves what He may be thinking of our present attitude and our present conduct. Considering all the advantages that God has given us as a nation and all the mercies that He has shown to us from our very beginnings, we ought to ask ourselves whether we today are worthy of all that He has done for us. We ought to ask ourselves whether we, as a people, are doing our part; whether we are carrying out our moral obligations.

I do not think that anyone can study the history of this Nation of ours—study it deeply and earnestly—without becoming convinced that divine providence has played a great part in it. I have the feeling that God has created us and brought us to our present position of power and strength for some great purpose. And up to now we have been shirking it. Now we are assuming it, and now we must carry it through.

It is not given to us to know fully what that purpose is. But I think we may be sure of one thing. That is, that our country is intended to do all it can, in cooperation with other nations, to help create peace and preserve peace in this world. It is given to us to defend the spiritual values—the moral code—against the vast forces of evil that seek to destroy them.

This is a hard task. It is not one that we have asked for. At times, we would like to lay it down. And, as we go on with it, we shall see that it is full of uncertainties and sacrifices.

But we need not be afraid, if we have faith.

There is a lesson for us in the passage from the Bible which has just been read here. That part of the Book of Ezra describes the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem after the long captivity in Babylon. You remember how the writer describes the people shouting with a great shout when the foundation of the new temple was laid. And then the author goes on to tell us that some of those in the crowd, particularly the old men, did not shout. They wept when they saw the foundation stones set in place.

These were the men who remembered all the sacrifices—all the suffering of all the people—what their people had undergone during the captivity. They knew that these sacrifices had not been made in vain. They realized that, in spite of
all their troubles, and in the face of overwhelming odds, their faith had prevailed. And so they were too deeply moved to shout; they wept for joy. They gave thanks to God “because He is good, for his mercy endureth forever.” If we hold true to our faith, as they did, I am sure that we will be able to offer, on some future day, the same heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving and joy. We too will be able to give God the glory for the victory of freedom and justice and peace for which we are striving today.

We, too, shall say: “He is good, for His mercy endureth forever.”

[After concluding his address the President presented to the church the silver trowel he had used in laying the cornerstone, as follows.]

Doctor, it is a great pleasure for me to present to you this trowel, which I myself had specially made for this occasion. I hope this trowel will stand in your church as a symbol of a trowel to spread religion and truth through the congregation and throughout the world.

[The President then received a copy of the New Testament from Peter John Marshall, son of the late pastor of the church who was also Chaplin of the United States Senate at the time of his death. He then resumed speaking.] Well, thank you very much for this Testament. I appreciate very much having it. And all I can say to you is, I hope you will grow up to be as good a man as your father.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:15 p.m. In his opening words he referred to Dr. George M. Docherty, pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington.

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Appendix II

Chronology of 1954 Coup in Guatemala

Several books and studies have described the events leading to the United States support for Guatemalan rebel Carlos Castillo Armas to topple the Arbenz government. A brief chronology of events will help put the discussion into a structured context. All of the events identified below, unless otherwise identified and referenced, are acknowledged in declassified U.S. government documents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>May 15 United Fruit Company lobbyist Thomas Corcoran meets with Deputy Assistant Secretary for American Republic Affairs Thomas Mann to suggest ousting of Guatemalan President Juan José Arévalo¹</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November 11 Arbenz elected president of Guatemala</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Year of bad weather and labor disputes for United Fruit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 25 CIA station in Mexico City begins receiving weekly reports from rebel leader Castillo Armas</td>
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<td>April or May Nicaraguan President Somoza proposes to President Truman that they cooperate to oust Arbenz government, and Truman</td>
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agrees and informs CIA; this would become the basis for PBFORTUNE, which planned two coup attempts, neither of which transpired

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>June 17</td>
<td>Guatemalan Agrarian Reform Law enacted</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 10</td>
<td>Republican Party adopts platform (foreign policy planks written by John Foster Dulles) accusing Truman administration of harboring communists and traitors and of being insufficiently aggressive in rolling back communist gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 10</td>
<td>Allen Dulles (CIA) meets with Thomas Mann (State) to request State approval of plan to overthrow Arbenz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 18</td>
<td>CIA launches PBFORTUNE, first plan to overthrow Arbenz (ultimately two dates were scheduled)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 19</td>
<td>Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT) legalized</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1953

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Eisenhower becomes president of the United States; Allen Dulles becomes director of Central Intelligence; John Foster Dulles becomes secretary of state; Walter Bedell Smith transfers from head of CIA to undersecretary of state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 19</td>
<td>Communists and leftists score huge victories in Guatemala congressional elections (no allegations of voter fraud)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 5</td>
<td>Guatemalan Congress impeaches members of Supreme Court because of their resistance in applying Agrarian Reform Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 25</td>
<td>Guatemala confiscates 234,000 acres of United Fruit land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 18</td>
<td>Report: NSC 144/1; the first Latin American policy document of the new Eisenhower administration identifies “drift in area towards radical and nationalist regimes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 19</td>
<td>Report: NIE-84 U.S. intelligence community assessment of the situation in Guatemala (replaces NIE-62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 12</td>
<td>NSC approves covert action against Guatemala (later named PBSUCCESS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 11</td>
<td>“General Plan of Action” for PBSUCCESS submitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 14</td>
<td>Assistant Secretary Cabot attacks Guatemalan government for “openly playing the Communist game” and claims that the United States had suffered “years of wanton attacks” by the Guatemalan government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 16</td>
<td>Chairman of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Alexander Wiley, alleges “communism has established a strong beachhead in Guatemala”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 4</td>
<td>New U.S. ambassador to Guatemala, John Peurifoy (formerly U.S. ambassador to Greece) arrives and presents his credentials to the government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 9</td>
<td>Guatemalan government official (José Manuel Fortuny) travels to Prague to purchase weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 9</td>
<td>Dulles (CIA) approves plan for PBSUCCESS and authorizes $3,000,000 for operation 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>early January Guatemala security services uncover PBSUCCESS documents revealing U.S. plans to overthrow the government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 25</td>
<td>Guatemala begins arrests of suspects identified in PBSUCCESS documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 29</td>
<td>Guatemala publishes paper reporting details of PBSUCCESS and accuses United States of planning invasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 18</td>
<td>CIA plans propaganda operation involving “Church circles” in Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 19</td>
<td>Operation WASHTUB begins; plan by CIA to plant Soviet arms in Nicaragua to incriminate Guatemalan government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 24</td>
<td>Guatemala confiscates an additional 173,000 acres of United Fruit land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1–13</td>
<td>Secretary of State John Foster Dulles travels to Caracas, Venezuela, to attend the Tenth Inter-American Conference and to lobby for a resolution condemning communism in Latin America; Dulles does not disclose that the CIA is currently running an operation to overthrow the government of Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 13</td>
<td>OAS votes 17-1 to condemn communism in Guatemala; Dulles briefed on status of PBSUCCESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 21</td>
<td>CIA’s paramilitary training program graduates 37 Guatemalan sabotage trainees (ultimately 85 would receive such training in Nicaragua) 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 28</td>
<td>Caracas Declaration of Solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March–April</td>
<td>CIA seeks support from Cardinal Spellman regarding Catholic Church in Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 9</td>
<td>Archbishop Rossell y Arellano issues statement calling for opposition to communism (it was likely written with the assistance of Cardinal Spellman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 17</td>
<td>State and CIA give “full green light” to PBSUCCESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 22</td>
<td>Report: Reappraisal of NIE-84: “Probable Developments in Guatemala.” Conclusions remain “essentially valid”—although it goes on to make harsher judgments: “Communists now effectively control the political life of Guatemala” and there is “no prospect of a break between Arbenz and the Communists.” The “possibility of effective internal political action does not exist.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>U.S. Ambassador Peurifoy concludes Guatemala now suppressing independent press and that “more drastic and definitive steps to overthrow the government must be taken.” The “Archbishop’s letter” was “definitely encouraging.” Government “is absolutely under control of a small Communist group.” Recommends that leaflets containing archbishop’s letter be dropped from the air over Guatemala.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1</td>
<td>CIA radio station codenamed SHERWOOD begins broadcasts to Guatemala from Nicaragua (“an aggressive program outlining the activities which would ultimately bring down the Communist threat” )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 15</td>
<td>Ship bearing Czechoslovak arms docks in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala; commando raids by CIA-trained operatives fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 24</td>
<td>U.S. Navy begins sea blockade of Guatemala (Operation HARDROCK BAKER)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 29</td>
<td>Guatemalan government exposes and breaks up Castillo Armas’s operations inside the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 31</td>
<td>Consistent with OAS Charter, Arbenz offers to meet with Eisenhower to negotiate, but the United States ignores the offer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 14</td>
<td>Eisenhower signs law inserting “under God” into the Pledge of Allegiance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 14</td>
<td>U.S.-sponsored air flights (C-47, F-47, Cessna) begin over Guatemala “to distribute cargo, distribute propaganda and for staging and bombing missions”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 15</td>
<td>U.S.-sponsored rebel sabotage teams launched from Nicaragua and Honduras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 17</td>
<td>U.S.-sponsored rebels cross border into Guatemala</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 18</td>
<td>Arbenz holds rally in Guatemala City; CIA planes fly overhead distributing leaflets; Castillo Armas crosses into Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 21</td>
<td>Largest rebel force suffers complete defeat at Puerto Barrios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 25</td>
<td>U.S.-sponsored planes drop bombs on Guatemala City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 27</td>
<td>Arbenz capitulates in Guatemala City; Castillo Armas loses another battle, this time at Zacapa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 28</td>
<td>U.S.-sponsored plane drops two bombs; new junta formed in Guatemala City without Castillo Armas; U.S. advises junta that U.S. supports Castillo Armas and junta agrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 14–17</td>
<td>CIA sends PBHISTORY team to Guatemala to find records of communist infiltration and involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1</td>
<td>Castillo Armas becomes president</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix III

**CIA Cable April 28, 1954**

The far left column is the cable as declassified by the CIA but with the code words in the original document retained exactly how they appeared. The center column replaces the code words (which were declassified elsewhere). The far right column is a plain-English interpretation of the content of the cable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As Published by CIA</th>
<th>Declassified Code Words Replaced</th>
<th>Plain English Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Increasing Catholic activities in WSBURNT, noted in ref, make supporting action by Catholic Church dignitaries, lay groups, publications elsewhere in SGRANGER highly desirable for effect in</td>
<td>1. Increasing Catholic activities in [Guatemala], noted in ref, make supporting action by Catholic Church dignitaries, lay groups, publications elsewhere in SGRANGER [not declassified] highly</td>
<td>1. The cable to which this one responds [likely from CIA station inside Guatemala] acknowledges increasing Catholic anticommunist activities in Guatemala. It would be beneficial for CIA Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As Published by CIA</td>
<td>Declassified Code Words Replaced</td>
<td>Plain English Interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSBURNT and internationally.</td>
<td>desirable for effect in [Guatemala] and internationally.</td>
<td>operation if Catholic Church dignitaries, lay groups, publications elsewhere in the world publicize these activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Suggest that [two code words not declassified] committee in [place not declassified] and contacts in [three places not declassified] and anywhere else in SGRANGER might be contacted through stations concerned on via PBPRIME Catholic channels.

2. Suggest that [two code words not declassified] committee in [place not declassified] and contacts in [three places not declassified] and anywhere else in SGRANGER might be contacted through CIA stations concerned on via [United States] Catholic channels.

2. Probably is recommending that CIA contacts in western hemisphere be contacted by CIA stations through Catholic contacts inside the United States. The cable implies that the CIA has ongoing working relationships with Catholic officials inside the United States regarding contacts with Catholics outside the United States.

3. Action might be tied to pastoral letter already publicized and could aim at: A. Warning against spread atheistic communism B. Prayer, assistance for endangered faithful in WSBURNt, defense of their Catholic schools, youth activities, other church assets C. Faithful to avoid spiritual contamination from Commie-controlled WSBURNt government agencies, fronts, propaganda media.

3. Action might be tied to pastoral letter already publicized and could aim at: A. Warning against spread atheistic communism B. Prayer, assistance for endangered faithful in [Guatemala], defense of their Catholic schools, youth activities, other church assets C. Faithful to avoid spiritual contamination from Commie-controlled [Guatemala] government agencies, fronts, propaganda media.

3. Possible future action could be tied to the Rossell y Arellano pastoral letter recently publicized. Probably is recommending that Catholics inside the United States be enlisted to warn other Catholics (both inside and outside the United States) against the spread of “atheistic communism” and that actions include prayers, publicity, youth activities and that people be warned against believing statements made by government of Guatemala because it is “communist controlled.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As Published by CIA</th>
<th>Declassified Code Words Replaced</th>
<th>Plain English Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. LINC answering ref by dispatch.</td>
<td>4. [CIA station codenamed Lincoln] answering ref by dispatch.</td>
<td>4. References message to which this responds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Advise.</td>
<td>5. Advise.</td>
<td>5. Asks for further instructions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Chapter 1. Launching Spiritual Weapons

7. Ibid.
8. Schine was an heir to a large hotel fortune. There have long been rumors that Cohn and Schine had a homosexual relationship. In a speech from the Senate floor denouncing McCarthy and Roy Cohn, Vermont Senator Ralph Flanders, a Republican, hinted as much from the Senate floor in one of the most cited speeches against McCarthy, where he suggested that Cohn “seems to have an almost passionate anxiety to retain [Schine]. Why?” New York Times, June 2, 1954. Nevertheless, the rumors are almost certainly false. Schine later married Miss Universe of 1955, Hillevi Rombin of Sweden.
9. Although the Knights of Columbus as an organization never formally endorsed McCarthy, the organization, its members, and its journal, Columbia, were actively involved in promoting him and praising him, even after his death. Donald F. Crosby, S.J., God, Church, and Flag: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the Catholic Church, 1950–1957 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 221–23, 235. The Knights’ journal Columbia said of him: “the Senator was killed—the victim of the most shameful, deliberately contrived and unrelenting attack ever directed against a loyal citizen of the United States.” Ibid., 223. In the American Legion’s annual convention in 1954, at the time that the Senate was preparing to issue its censure of McCarthy, the delegates adopted a plank in its platform that “strongly commended” McCarthy’s committee and opposed any efforts to restrict his or his committee’s powers. Washington Post,
September 3, 1954. (The same platform also called upon the Congress to place the words “In God We Trust” on currency.) Cardinal Spellman, who is often thought to have been a supporter of McCarthy, was in fact more circumspect and ambiguous in his comments about McCarthy than are often imagined by those who disliked both. Cardinal Spellman did offer defenses of McCarthy, but never of the full-throated variety, and frequently they were offered in such a way as to make Spellman’s listeners guess exactly what he meant. Crosby, God, Church, and Flag, 133–34, 159–60; “Spellman Answers Speech by Flanders,” New York Times, June 17, 1954.

10. See Chapter 8.


12. Nick Cullather, Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala 1952–1954 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 87. With echoes of the Second Gulf War in 2003, on June 20, 1954, France introduced a resolution to the UN Security Council calling upon all governments to refrain from aiding what appeared to be a Guatemalan rebel operation (but was in fact a CIA operation). The United States had never previously vetoed a resolution in the Security Council, and because it did not want to draw its attention to the measure, voted along with the Security Council majority at the same time it was violating the resolution. The following day, Guatemalan Foreign Minister Toriello asked the Security Council to take measures to enforce the previous day’s resolution, which could have meant that the United Nations would send fact-finding inspectors into Guatemala, a move the U.S. government strongly opposed. Ibid., 92.


14. For a discussion of the drafting of the letter and the possible participation of Cardinal Spellman, see pp. 144–45, 220.


18. For further discussion of MacArthur’s land reform in Japan, see pp. 136–37.


20. For Castillo Armas being the favorite of Rossell, see Gleijeses, Shattered Hope, 221. For Castillo Armas’s banner, see Time, June 28, 1954.


22. FRUS, 1952–1954, Guatemala, 329 n.3. The New York Times, later acknowledged acceding to the CIA’s wishes. In retrospect it seems very curious that CIA officials would complain about Gruson’s reporting. For the most part his reporting took a hard line against Arbenz and the influence of communism in the country. It seems that the “communist infiltrated” Arbenz government was not altogether unlike the CIA in their dislike of Gruson’s reporting, as they successfully expelled him from the country. Cullather, Secret History, 54.


27. An excellent new book exploring religion and U.S. foreign policy was published just as this book, *Spiritual Weapons*, was going to press: William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945–1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Inboden’s book, which grew out of his doctoral dissertation at Yale University, approaches many issues in a way significantly different from this book. Inboden provides some detailed treatment of many of the debates within the American foreign policy establishment as well as highlights the role that religion played in the lives of some important decisionmakers, particularly Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, Senator H. Alexander Smith, and John Foster Dulles. He examines some topics not discussed here (often with the benefit of archival research), including the fascinating role played by Myron Taylor as the U.S. emissary to the Vatican under Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman. *Religion and American Foreign Policy* also offers detailed and helpful discussions of the debates among Protestants between 1945 and 1960, including particularly the role played by the Federal Council of Churches (later the National Council of Churches) and the World Council of Churches. Ibid., 29–102. Inboden does not emphasize several of the themes included in *Spiritual Weapons*, including the role that anticommunism played on shaping religion in America or the resulting consequences abroad (such as Guatemala and Vietnam) of the American linking of religion to its foreign policy. Ultimately, Inboden seems more inclined than I to believe that there was piety behind the prayers, as our different treatments of Eisenhower show.

28. It is always easy to argue over the definition of “religion” and there is often a tendency to use the term broadly when describing an ideological viewpoint that is firmly held by someone with whom we disagree, just as NSC-68 referred to the “fanatic faith” of the Soviet Union. The term “religion” is used as a descriptive term here for two principal reasons. First, while it obviously is not a religion comparable to Lutheranism or Orthodox Judaism, it is designed to suggest, as does the term “civil religion,” that a variety of symbols and themes are understood to unify a people and that the symbols and themes evoke at a minimum quasi-religious sentiments. There is a type of reverence for the American flag that is qualitatively different even from a photograph of the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. Ten Commandments monuments, the uniform of American soldiers, and “free-enterprise” and “capitalism” often evoke reverential responses beyond those of simple agreement or disagreement with intellectual viewpoints.

In addition, “religion” is appropriate because the three values have themselves become part and parcel of religious beliefs as many Americans now understand them. This is of course easiest to observe with *governmental theism*, where religious leaders are often a motivating force stimulating the government to erect a monument or to declare a day of fasting and prayer. While less obvious, religion in America has become tied to the U.S. military since 1947 in an ongoing way that it was not before. Prior to World War II, religious leaders, including evangelical Christians, were often vocal pacifists and critics of military spending. Since the late 1940s, many religious leaders—most obviously on the
conservative side of the spectrum—have become quite vocal supporters of the military and frequently of military action.


30. The year 1947 was not the first time in American history that the military had undergone a buildup when the country was not actually in a war, but it certainly was one of the most dramatic. The most obvious competitor for the distinction was the military buildup of the 1890s that culminated in the Spanish-American War. The first major peacetime “entangling alliance” that the United States would have in its history was the North Atlantic Treaty (1949).

Chapter 2. Present at the Creation:
The American National Religion


5. Harry S. Truman, Years of Trial and Hope (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 106.


7. Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 106.


10. The new Congress that convened in January 1947 included three recently elected members who would have a significant influence over the United States and the Cold War during the next two decades: Senator Joseph McCarthy, Congressman John F. Kennedy, and Congressman Richard M. Nixon. Nixon would become a senator four years later, in the same class as Everett Dirksen, and Kennedy six years later, in the same class as Barry Goldwater, Prescott Bush, and Albert Gore Sr.

11. During the Second World War, the Soviet Union was an ally of the United States in its fight against Nazi Germany. Stalin and Hitler formed a brief alliance (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) that lasted from 1939 until Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. During the 1940s, the Soviet Union came to be regarded by Americans as a vital and powerful—though not necessarily reliable—ally in the struggle against Hitler. (Hollywood released some films during the war, the most notorious of which was Mission to Moscow, that portrayed Stalin as a strong and principled leader who was an effective ally of the United States.) From 1941 until 1945, it was Stalin’s Russia that experienced the greatest suffering of the war and incurred the greatest loss of life of all the allied countries. While estimates differ dramatically, approximately 300,000 Americans lost their lives during the war, somewhere between 15 and 25 million Soviets died—three times more
souls than Germany lost. Japan’s losses were between two and three million—one-tenth of that suffered by the Soviets. The bloody and heroic invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, took the lives approximately 1,500 Americans. The Battle of Stalingrad, which lasted several months, took the lives of more than 750,000 Soviets. Twice as many Soviets died during the Battle of Stalingrad as did Americans during the entire war with Germany and Japan combined. It was the Soviet Union’s vast capacity to absorb the Nazi fighting machine in the East that gave the Americans and the British the time to prepare their invasions in North Africa, Italy, and France.


13. The precise number of “known” communists singled out by Senator McCarthy changed over time. For a contemporaneous discussion of McCarthy’s changing his figures, the New York Times, May 4, 1950, describes the contentious debate in the Senate from the day before.


17. When Graham used his 1950 meeting with Truman to gain publicity for himself, Truman pronounced him to be a “counterfeit” and would never see Graham again. No subsequent president refused to see Graham and all wanted their pictures taken with him.

18. His first trial in 1949 had resulted in a hung jury. The statute of limitations had run on any potential charges of espionage, and there is substantial evidence that he may well have been guilty. His guilt or innocence remains a matter of controversy.


20. Bad tidings were in store for the chairman of the committee that criticized McCarthy. During Tydings’s reelection campaign that year, McCarthy and his staff released a falsified composite photograph that merged the pictures of him and Earl Browder, the former first secretary of the Communist Party in America. Tydings was defeated, bringing to an end a political career that had spanned not only four terms in the U.S. Senate but also two in the U.S. House of Representatives.


22. Acheson, Present at the Creation, 365.

23. Professor Leo P. Ribuffo is particularly articulate in explaining the underlying values that have shaped a broad continuity in much of American foreign policy, particularly since the time of President Woodrow Wilson. See, for example, Leo P. Ribuffo, “Contrarian Thoughts,” in Rethinking Cold War Culture, ed. Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 201–23.

Chapter 3. Enduring American Themes

1. September 14, 2001. The president’s next sentence seemed less and less prophetic, and more and more arrogant, as the following months passed: “This conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others. It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing.” Two of the most important and influential studies of the relationship between American ideologies and American foreign policy are: Walter Russell Mead, Special Providence:

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5. One of the most famous passages from The Virginian epitomizes this calm but tough cowboy.

The Virginian’s pistol came out, and his hand lay on the table, holding it unaimed. And with a voice as gentle as ever, the voice that sounded almost like a caress, but drawing a very little more than usual, so that there was almost a space between each word, he issued his orders to the man Trampas:

“When you call me that, smile!”

And he looked at Trampas across the table. Yes, the voice was gentle. But in my ears it seemed as if somewhere the bell of death was ringing; and silence, like a stroke, fell on the large room.


At the time World War I began, young Alvin York, on whom the movie Sergeant York was based, was a pacifist. But provoked by the injustices of the Germans and the wish to serve his country, the pacifist went to war. Sergeant York threw himself into combat and ultimately became the most decorated American combat soldier of the war. His counterpart was Audie Murphy, who became the most decorated combat solider of World War II. Taking advantage of the national celebrity he bravely won in war, Murphy subsequently became a popular Hollywood actor in more than 40 films, most of which were Westerns. As discussed in Chapter 8, Murphy was type-cast in the role of CIA officer “Pyle” in the screen version of The Quiet American.


17. President George W. Bush ended his first inaugural address by evoking the same biblical passage from Nahum: “And an angel still rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm. God bless you all, and God bless America.” http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/inaugural-address.html.

18. The book of Jonah uses the sobriquet “slow to anger” to refer to God (Jonah 4:2) as does Nehemiah (Nehemiah 9:17); Psalms (Psalm 145:8); and Joel (Joel 2:13).

19. The book of Revelation has played a particularly influential role for those American Protestants who interpret its symbolic language as revealing divine prophecies about the events leading up to the second coming of Jesus Christ. While most biblical scholars believe that the “prophecies” in Revelation should actually be understood as allegorical references to events occurring at the time it was written in the first-century, many religious people believe that the book provides veiled but valuable insights about the end of the world. See Paul Boyer, When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), and Eugen Weber, Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).


21. The “religious liberty” that this metaphorical American warrior will bring to Europe is not the “free exercise of religion” identified in the First Amendment. “Religious liberty” here means “Protestantism,” and, among the tyrannical beasts that the United States will cross the Atlantic to slay is Roman Catholicism—the real enemy of religious liberty. The false prophets—popes, saints, bishops, and priests—will be ousted and the United States will set free the prisoners of papist superstition and autocratic governments.


26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
31. “These, and many other matters which might be noticed, add a volume of unofficial declarations to the mass of organic utterances that this is a Christian nation.” Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States, 143 U.S. 457, 471 (1892). Justice Brewer later wrote a book whose very title emphasized this finding. David J. Brewer, The United States a Christian Nation (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1905). For public opinion polls showing that between 60 and 65 percent of Americans think of their country as a “Christian nation,” see, for example: First Amendment Center, State of the First Amendment Reports (beginning in 2007), and Religion & Ethics Newsweekly, Religion and America’s Role in the World (October 22, 2008), 22.
35. AP/Ipsos, June 6, 2005.
37. January 27, 1992, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=20540. This is not the only time that he made such a comment:

But anyway, as we meet today, deep in the heart of Texas, we meet deep in the heart of the most religious nation on Earth, too. I’m usually not much for polls, but here’s a Gallup poll that makes sense to me. According to this survey, 7 in 10 Americans believe in life after death; 8 in 10, that God works miracles; 9 in 10 pray; and more than 90 percent believe in God. To which I say, thank God for the United States of America...

38. Tuveson, Redeemer Nation, 34.
39. Ibid., 97, 103.
40. Herman Melville, White-Jacket or The World in a Man-of-War (Boston: The Saint Botolph Society, 1892), 144. White-Jacket was originally published in 1850.
43. Tuveson, Redeemer Nation, 137.
Notes

49. Tuveson, Redeemer Nation, 96.
51. Ibid. (emphasis added).
52. Tuveson, Redeemer Nation, 211. Speaking of ratification of the Covenant of the League of Nations, Woodrow Wilson said “For nothing less depends upon this decision [whether to ratify], nothing less than the liberation and salvation of the world.”
55. Cited in Tuveson, Redeemer Nation, 211.

Chapter 4. Governmental Theism: Religion as the “First Line of Defense”

2. Executive Session, June 27, 1955, Senate Committee on Banking and Currency (84th Cong., 1st sess.), 7. In the 1970s, Senator Fulbright was widely known as the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a leading opponent of the Vietnam War. In the 1950s, he was widely known as the chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, and a leading opponent of civil rights and integration. He, like Rep. Charles E. Bennett, sponsor of “In God We Trust,” was a signatory of the “Southern Manifesto,” which criticized the Supreme Court’s 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision.
3. Six weeks before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt delivered a major foreign policy speech at a black-tie “Navy Day” event broadcast by radio. The speech was designed to push Congress into responding more forcefully to the repeated attacks by the Third Reich’s navy on American naval and commercial vessels. The Nazis had attacked two U.S. Navy destroyers and had sunk several American commercial vessels. Roosevelt declared starkly, “America has been attacked.” New York Times, October 28, 1941. Roosevelt wanted to fight the Nazis, but many in Congress—led by Republican Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan—did not want to repeal the neutrality laws that had been in existence since 1935. Despite the Nazis’ repeated attacks on U.S. vessels, Senator Vandenberg “pleaded for one more attempt at other recourse before Congress adopts its neutrality-real resolution and thus ‘needlessly and unwisely asks for war.’” Ibid. While speaking at the Navy Day celebration, Roosevelt’s target audience was the U.S. Congress, which was then debating repeal of the neutrality laws.

In his effort to goad Congress and the American people into supporting stronger defensive preparations against the Nazis, Roosevelt appealed to the religious sentiments of Americans by describing a secret, captured document revealing Hitler’s plan to suppress religion. “It is a plan to abolish all existing religions, Catholic, Protestant, and Mohammedan, Hindu, Buddhist and Jewish alike. The property of all churches will be seized by the Reich and its puppets.” Ibid. Roosevelt also referred to another captured document

4. The year 1939 also was noticeable also for being the year that the Senate began its tradition of opening each daily session with prayer. Robert C. Byrd, *The Senate, 1789–1989* vol. 2. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1991), 306.

5. For McKinley, see Chapter 1.


11. This March 1948 letter to the clergy was written almost one year to the day after he issued the Loyalty Program in March 1947.


14. He did not win a Pulitzer for a later proposal, which urged all Americans to write a letter to Joseph Stalin “telling him that we’re for peace and asking him to cut out the dirty work and join up.” Reprinted in *The Grosse Pointe Review*, July 27, 1950.


22. 36 U.S.C. sec. 119. The date of the event was changed during the Reagan administration. For Billy Graham’s urging, see *New York Times*, February 4, 1952.

23. A quasi-official organization, “The National Day of Prayer Task Force,” has taken upon itself the promotion of observance of the National Day of Prayer law. The Task Force’s web site promotes public prayer, praises the power of prayer, and quotes dozens of scriptures. The web site does not, however, quote the most pertinent scripture on public prayer:

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. (Matthew 6:5–6)
The web site for the National Day of Prayer Task Force is http://www.ndptf.org/home/home.html. It is headed by Shirley Dobson, the wife of the founder of Focus on the Family, James Dobson. Across its web site banner are links to “Church” “Military” “Donate.” The theme for the National Day of Prayer in 2008 was: “Prayer! America’s Strength & Shield.”


27. Other scholars, notably Robert N. Bellah, have to some extent defended this as a “civil religion” that helps tie together people and their country in an ethical and moral system. Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” Daedalus 96 (1967): 1–21. For a collection of some of the most important essays on this theme, see Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, eds., American Civil Religion (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1974) which includes Bellah’s famous article. In the American context, Benjamin Franklin is sometimes credited with originating the idea of a “public religion” that is useful to society.

History will also afford the frequent Opportunities of showing the Necessity of a Publick Religion, from its Usefulness to the Publick; the Advantage of a Religious Character among private Persons; the Mischiefs of Superstition, &c and the Excellency of the Christian Religion above all others, ancient or modern.

Benjamin Franklin, Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania (Philadelphia, 1749), 22 (emphasis in original). Jean-Jacques Rousseau is frequently credited with originating the phrase “civil religion” in Du contrat social (1762).


29. When the term “Judeo-Christian” first came into common parlance during the twentieth century it was not in the context of seeking theological commonality in American religion, but as a way of encouraging Christians to take greater interest in the sufferings of European Jews as a consequence of the rise of Fascism. Mark Silk, “Notes on the Judeo-Christian Tradition in America,” American Quarterly 36 (Spring 1984): 65–85.

30. New York Times, January 25, 1953. Rabbi Segal’s viewpoint contrasts markedly with that of Rabbi Krauskopf 50 years earlier, who protested against President Theodore Roosevelt’s call to celebrate a day of thanksgiving in houses of worship across the country as being “subversive of the religious liberty in which the nation was founded…” He “strongly” opposed such proclamations because he saw that “a Government’s interference in matters religious…as a danger against which we cannot be sufficiently on our guard.” New York Times, November 19, 1906.

31. George H.W. Bush did so as well. Eisenhower was not the first president to lead Americans in prayer over the national airwaves. President Franklin Roosevelt did so as well on the evening of June 6, 1944.

Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization,
and to set free a suffering humanity.... With Thy blessing, we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy. Help us to conquer the apostles of greed and racial arrogances. Lead us to the saving of our country, and with our sister nations into a world unity that will spell a sure peace—a peace invulnerable to the schemings of unworthy men. And a peace that will let all of men live in freedom, reaping the just rewards of their honest toil. Thy will be done, Almighty God. Amen.


34. Billy Graham, *Just As I Am* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 190. In his presidential memoirs, Eisenhower’s brief reference to religion was that “until elected President, I had never had a formal connection with any specific church. In the military I had attended the post chapel and services conducted by ministers of various denominations...[T]here as embedded in me from boyhood...a deep faith in the beneficence of the Almighty. I wanted, then, to make this faith clear....I was seeking a way to point out that we were getting too secular.” Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1953–1956 (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), 100.


36. The two men had known each other in the army and Eisenhower had appointed Elson to be the army’s chief envoy to the German Protestant churches. Elson had once hoped to become a cadet at West Point and go into military service. After a religious calling beckoned him, he combined his two interests and became a chaplain in the U.S. Army in Europe. Elson’s militant, if not militaristic, nationalism later caused some distress among many affiliated with his church. In 1969, while still serving at National Presbyterian, Elson became the chaplain of the U.S. Senate. In that same year, the Reverend Elson officiated at the funeral services of President Eisenhower at Washington National Cathedral. For Eisenhower and religion during his presidency, see Gary Scott Smith, *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chap. 7. Graham and Elson were Eisenhower’s closest spiritual advisors. Ibid., 241.


41. Ibid.


43. *New York Times*, March 3, 1953. Thus Senator McCarthy’s investigation implicitly revealed that an important distinction between the Soviet Union and the United States was that in one country you could be investigated for believing in God and going to church, whereas in the other country you could be investigated for not believing in God or attending church.


46. The official story offered by the National Prayer Breakfast Committee is that the idea to transform the private congressional prayer breakfasts into a public Presidential Prayer Breakfast was Eisenhower’s. Billy Graham presents a different story, saying that Eisenhower was a reluctant participant. Graham, *Just As I Am*, 202–3.

47. The event was organized by International Christian Leadership (now known as “the Fellowship”) which, in 1953, also established the “Christian Embassy” in Washington, DC. The background of the organization is provided in depth in Jeff Sharlet, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* (New York: Harper, 2008).

48. Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Remarks at the Dedicatory Prayer Breakfast of the International Christian Leadership,” February 5, 1953. That Eisenhower may have been unaware that he was scheduled to speak to the group may be inferred from his opening words: “This has been a wholly enjoyable occasion for me except for the one second when I opened the little blue slip and found that it said there would be an address by the President.”


50. This is clear in his autobiography (cited herein).

51. Eisenhower’s concluding words at the Presidential Prayer Breakfast may say something more about his priorities than his comments about prayer: “I do hope I may speak for all of you in thanking [Senator Frank Carlson] for such a breakfast, the like of which I have not had in 10 years. As long as you feed me grits and sausage, everything will be all right. Thank you.” Billy Graham, who had been impressed by Eisenhower’s spirituality during their first meeting in France in 1952, found his expectations more than satisfied by the end of the first year of Eisenhower’s presidency. “Now I think those expectations have not only been fulfilled but have gone beyond my wildest dreams.” The examples that Graham identified as impressing him included the inaugural prayer, the president’s attendance at church, and his “spiritual utterances.” *Washington Post*, November 4, 1953.


55. Ibid.


58. Ibid.


68. 100 Cong. Rec., 83rd Cong. 2d sess. (1954), 7763.
70. Time, May 4, 1953. Rabaut (in support of a bill he had introduced before Eisenhower’s conversion).
71. 100 Cong. Rec., 83rd Cong. 2d sess. (1954), 7762.
72. Ibid., 7763.
75. J. Res. 60 (adopted by House, 99 Cong. Rec., 83rd Cong. 1st sess., 9125 (1953) and by the Senate, 100 Cong. Rec., 83rd Cong. 2nd Sess., 5929 (1954).

According to Washington’s own pastor, however, the first president was never known to kneel in prayer. The image of General Washington on bended knee is an American legend that first surfaced in the eighth edition of Mason Locke Weems’s biography of the president. The source of Weems’s story was identified as a Quaker named Isaac Potts, who, while walking on his farm, allegedly saw Washington in private prayer during the 1777–78 winter at Valley Forge. Potts, who did indeed have a farm at Valley Forge, was not, however, present during that cruel winter. Weems also was the author of the myth of George Washington and the cherry tree. Weems identified himself in his biography of Washington as the pastor of the “Mount Vernon Parish” which, like many of the stories he told, was untrue. The false story about prayer by the false pastor of Mount Vernon is nevertheless commemorated in the prayer room of the Capitol.

79. Annuit coeptis is typically and inaccurately translated as “God has favored our undertakings.” The Latin term for God is Deo (ablative of Deus). If the those who adopted this original expression had wanted to say it in Latin, they could have said “Deo favente.” A more accurate translation of the motto would be “our undertakings have been favored.” “Novus ordo seclorum” means “a new order of the ages.”
80. In the fourth stanza of “The Star Spangled Banner,” Francis Scott Key wrote:

        Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just, And this be our motto: “In God is our trust!”

In 1864, in the midst of the Civil War, Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase suggested the inclusion of the phrase on a two-cent coin. During the following years, the phrase “In God We Trust” was placed on most, though not all, U.S. coins.
82. Roosevelt to William Boldly, November 11, 1907 (published in the New York Times, November 14, 1907). President Roosevelt offered a few now-dated examples of the phrase being used for humorous purposes. A more contemporary version, not used by Roosevelt, would have been: “In God we trust. All others pay cash.”
83. Religious groups debated whether the phrase should be added. The Episcopal Diocesan Convention, for example, had a “red-hot debate” that was conducted in atmosphere of “some disorder.” *New York Times*, November 14, 1907. One delegate, sympathetic to the president’s position, argued that “godliness” is not shown in what is placed on money, “but in the way we keep our treaties.” Another argued that adding the phrase would go “against the express command: ‘You cannot worship God and Mammon.’” But the Episcopalians, like the U.S. Congress, voted strongly in favor of placing God on mammon. Having finished their contentious debate about God and money, the delegates switched to a much safer topic and easily re-elected J.P. Morgan as a Trustee of the Episcopal Diocese. (Ibid.)


85. Ibid., 7795.


87. According to the Eisenhower Library, this was pursuant to H.R. 692 (June 20, 1956). Some post offices continued to use the postmark into the 1970s.


89. Ibid.


98. *New York Times*, August 5, 1956. (This would have been roughly $5,000.00 in 2000 dollars.)


101. Ibid.

102. Ibid.


106. Ibid., 442. In an interesting aside, Graham noted in retrospect that he “wonder[ed] whether I might have exaggerated his spirituality in my own mind. . . . In retrospect, whenever he spoke about the Lord, it was in pretty general terms.” Ibid. Graham does not inquire as to whether the same might have been said about the spirituality of General Eisenhower.


110. *New York Times*, June 6, 1960. In a sermon that could have been delivered in 1947, 1957, 1967, 1977, or later, Billy Graham said that people had been taught during the past generation that morality is relative and not absolute; we’ve done away with the Ten Commandments; we’ve done away with the Sermon on the Mount, and now we’re reading the results in dishonesty, lying, cover-up and hypocrisy.


111. Executive Session, June 27, 1955, Senate Committee on Banking and Currency, 7.

Chapter 5. A Military Second to None


7. Ibid., 14.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 2.

10. *New York Times*, June 3, 1919. The end of the war abroad was followed immediately by the beginning of the war at home. Labor unions instigated strikes that frequently were met by harsh crackdowns that in turn led to radicalization in the forms of anarchism or of socialism. Between February 6 and 11, 1919, a general strike incapacitated the city of Seattle. On May 1, 1919, fighting erupted in several American cities between labor marchers and onlookers. That same day, the government announced that it had uncovered a plot by radicals to assassinate 36 political figures.

During the two years following the June bombing on R Street, the attorney general oversaw what became known in history as the “Palmer Raids.” Using the federal police powers granted by the wartime Espionage and Sedition Acts, Palmer’s Justice Department oversaw mass roundups and deportations of aliens through its “Bureau of Investigation” (which subsequently became the Federal Bureau of Investigation). The Palmer Raids catapulted into national prominence not only the future FBI as an institution, but the head of its “General Intelligence Division,” the 24-year-old J. Edgar Hoover. In a series of raids beginning in November 1919, thousands of people were arrested with and without warrants. As labor troubles increased, and with acts of violence being committed by and against perceived radicals, the end of 1919 and the beginning of 1920 became known as the time of the “Red Scare.” The attorney general used his national fame as the crusader against the Reds to launch his campaign for the Democratic nomination for president of the United States in 1920. Palmer frequently issued frightening statements about the
dangers of radicalism and the need for strong security measures. But as the year wore on, and as the Democratic convention approached, the press and the public became increasingly wary of his warnings and suspicious of his motives in scaring the electorate. After 38 ballots at the deadlocked Democratic Party Convention of 1920, Palmer withdrew his candidacy after which the convention nominated James M. Cox to be the standard-bearer. Curiously, Palmer’s R Street neighbor, Franklin D. Roosevelt, still in his thirties, became the vice-presidential candidate. Palmer, like Joseph McCarthy a half-century later, within the span of one year, fell from being the most prominent and influential politician battling the dangers of subversion to being rejected by the members of his own party. He quietly finished his term as attorney general and suffered a heart attack shortly thereafter from which he never fully recovered. One of the unintended legacies of the time was the birth in 1920 of the organization that became the American Civil Liberties Union, created to provide legal counsel for those swept up in the widespread arrests by Palmer and Hoover.

11. New York Times, November 12, 1918 (reporting on previous day’s statement).
24. Ibid.
27. For the Senate debates, see Denna F. Fleming, The Treaty Veto of the American Senate (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1930).
29. Harding and Coolidge received the highest percentage of popular votes (60 percent) in a presidential election up to that time since the election of George Washington. The Democrats won the solid south, but nothing else.
30. Among Harding’s opponents for the nomination were prominent senators who opposed the Versailles Treaty, including William Borah, Robert LaFollette, Hiram Johnson, Philander Knox, and Miles Poindexter. Unlike the postwar election of 1950, the American commander in Europe (General John J. Pershing) was unable to win his party’s nomination.


34. Ibid., 345.


For statistics on total military on active duty:

<table>
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<td>1947</td>
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<td>1953</td>
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48. *Time*, January 14, 1946. The uniformed protestors thus echoed language from 1944 assertions by the American Legion that war should be made a “profitless business.” *The Legion Called the Turn* (1944), 34.
51. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
55. General Eisenhower testified before Congress on January 15, 1946, and laid out in detail the army’s long-term demobilization plan. Although it did not entirely assuage the country, he was able to enlist the support of Congress and the program of demobilization continued its rapid, but no longer heedless, pace. See *New York Times*, January 16, 1946, January 20, 1946.
60. Ibid.
was much more difficult for them to find women. That difficulty was substantially reduced after the war ended when the (relatively) well-paid American troops occupied countries that had been completely devastated by war and that provided the inhabitants few opportunities for gainful employment. See Fussell, 105ff.

65. Ibid.
66. *New York Times*, July 14, 1946 (the existence of the letter had only recently been disclosed).
67. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. This vision of a fertile new missionary field would later be repeated following the collapse of the communist governments of central and eastern Europe in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It will no doubt be repeated once the communist governments of Vietnam, Cuba, China, and North Korea collapse.
78. Ibid., 11 (quoting memorandum, emphasis added).
79. Ibid., 16.
81. Ibid., 13, 14 (quoting Patrick J. Ryan).
83. Ibid.
84. *Time*, April 7, 1952.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
91. Ibid., 8.
92. Ibid., 9, 15, 17, 16, 233.
93. Dulles was not the only Republican to serve as a secretary of state to undergo such a transformation between 1945 and 1950. On September 11, 1945, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, who earlier had served as secretary of state under Herbert Hoover, wrote a memorandum to Truman urging the president to “trust” Stalin. But by 1948, he was embarrassed by having written the 1945 memorandum that he subsequently characterized as being “dangerously one-sided.” James Carroll, *House of War: The Pentagon and the Disastrous Rise of American Power* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 114.
95. Ibid., 12.
96. *War or Peace* was received by the Library of Congress on April 19, 1950.

97. *New York Times*, August 14, 1950, “Text of G.O.P. Senators’ Statement Charging Foreign Policy bungling in Europe, Asia.” The four senators who signed the statement were Alexander Wiley, H. Alexander Smith, Bourke B. Hickenlooper, and Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg was ill at the time (he died a few months later) but issued a statement saying that he supported it.

98. Ibid.

99. During the Second Gulf War, it was common to hear among many political leaders supporting President Bush that it was improper to criticize the president or the war “while American troops are in harm’s way.”


101. Although harshly and relentlessly criticizing President Truman in the statement, it concluded by stating “we whole-heartedly pledge our un-partisan cooperation to final victory.”

102. Republican Party Platform of 1952, available at www.presidency.ucsb.edu. All of the italics in the following quotations are added.

103. During the Second Gulf War, when the advocacy group MoveOn.org suggested that U.S. General David Petraeus had “betrayed us,” many Republican members of Congress expressed their outrage at the calumny against the general at a time that American soldiers were in harm’s way. It is worth comparing the tone of the statements made by the unofficial group MoveOn.org against those of the official Republican Party Platform of 1952, at a time that American troops were in harm’s way in Korea.


107. The composition of the two committees was not identical, though those named above sat on both. Some other important participants on the first committee included Roland H. Bainton of Yale, H. Richard Niebuhr, Yale University, and Henry P. Van Dusen, the president of Union Theological Seminary. Professor Paul Tillich, and others, were on the second committee but not the first. See also William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945–1960* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 32–35, 53–55.


110. The term had not yet caught on by August, when a group of Americans traveling to the Soviet Union dismissed the idea that there was an “iron curtain” dividing east and west and characterized it as a “figment of Winston Churchill’s imagination.” New York Times, August 2, 1946.


Chapter 6. Capitalism as Freedom: The Baptism of Free Enterprise

1. Herbert Hoover, American Individualism (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1922), 12 (emphasis added). Hoover’s book was reissued in 1934 after he left the presidency.

2. Undated film clip of Graham saying this on “With God on Our Side.”


7. Ibid., 145–46.

8. Ibid., 147.


12. Perhaps the most influential politician of the socialist ilk, though he called himself a “Progressive” after leaving the Republican Party, was Robert LaFollette, Sr., of Wisconsin. In an independent bid for president in 1924, in which he was supported by socialists, LaFollette received almost one-sixth of the votes. His son, Robert M. LaFollette, Jr., succeeded to his father’s seat in the U.S. Senate in 1925 and continued to serve until he was defeated by the relatively unknown Joseph McCarthy in 1946.


16. Ibid., 104, 107, 99, 106–7. For Winthrop’s and Reagan’s “City on a Hill,” see Chapter 2 above.
17. Ibid., 107–8.
18. Ibid., 100, 99.
19. Ibid., 100.
20. Hoover, American Individualism, 12 (emphasis added).
21. Ibid., 18.
22. Ibid., 53. It should be noted that Adam Smith was not an unqualified booster of capitalism.
24. Daddy Warbucks first appeared in Little Orphan Annie in 1924, two years before Garvin wrote “The Case for Capitalism.” In 1925, advertising executive Bruce Barton published The Man Nobody Knows, which argued that Jesus was the greatest salesman of all time. He did not argue, however, that Jesus was a “capitalist.”
27. Ibid., 8.

While intellectuals of the twenties and early thirties may have been overwhelmingly anticapitalist, as Garvin and Friedman insisted, the American government during this period before the rise to prominence of John Maynard Keynes largely adhered to something of a laissez-faire approach that was called “Classical Economics.” This largely allowed “capitalists” to operate in the market as they wished—“let the buyer beware”—unless they so thoroughly abused their power that the government would be obligated by public pressure to rescue the population from one excess or another, as it earlier had under the trust-busting presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, or in the creation of the Food and Drug Administration in 1906. Classical economics maintained that government health and safety interventions were not necessary because manufacturers of unsafe products ultimately would not succeed in the marketplace because the public would refuse to purchase defective or dangerous goods. (This theory seems not to have understood either manufacturers or consumers.) The natural, “classical economics” reaction of President Herbert Hoover to the stock market collapse of 1929, was not to enlist government support for employment programs or to engage in deficit spending in order to pump money into the economy, but to cut back further on government spending with the consequence that the market ills were compounded and the United States fell ever deeper into unemployment and depression. The prevailing belief among those who were making decisions on behalf of the government in the 1920s and early 1930s, was that for businesses to recover they simply needed to cut prices to a level where people would be willing once again to buy their products, and that laborers should look ever harder to find jobs and be willing to accept whatever pay the hidden hand of the market determined. With the collapse of the stock market following 1929, however, the hidden hand of the free market gave the back of its hand not only to the poor and the working classes, but to many now-destitute capitalists as well.
30. Just as Milton Friedman believed that his theories were opposed by the “overwhelming” number of intellectuals of the twenties and thirties, so Keynes believed that the classical economic theory of his day “dominated” academic thought on economics.


32. Ibid., 73.

33. Ibid., 13–14, 173.

34. Ibid., 14.


36. The young George Stigler, who later would receive the Nobel Prize in economics, was present at the meeting and had already been deeply influenced by Hayek’s book. He later observed about Hayek’s prediction about the inevitable loss of personal freedom resulting from governmental intrusions into the marketplace:

I believed much more in the central theme of The Road to Serfdom when it first appeared than I do now. . . . It is a fair reading of The Road to Serfdom to say that forty years more of the march toward socialism would lead to major losses of the political and economic freedom of individuals. Yet in those forty years we have seen that continuous expansion of the state in Sweden and England, even in Canada and the United States, without consequences for freedom so dire as those he predicted.

George Stigler, Memoirs, 146.

37. Ibid., 145.

38. Milton Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). The terms “capitalism,” “free enterprise,” and “laissez-faire,” like many others that are at the heart of political disputes, typically do not have precise definitions and are often better understood as code words or labels whose role is more to position the disputants rather than to enlighten the debate. “Capitalism is, however, a term more frequently used and debated than clearly defined; its precise meaning has seldom been widely agreed upon.” The Oxford Companion to United States History, ed. Paul S. Boyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 103.

It should be noted that another American who would have a profound influence on economic thought, Paul D. Samuelson (who in 1970 became the second person to win the Nobel Prize in economics), published a ground-breaking work in 1947: Foundations of Economic Analysis. Like Friedman, with whom he attended school at the University of Chicago, Samuelson was an early and ultimately very influential proponent of neoclassical economics who brought a new mathematical rigor to the profession. Unlike Friedman, however, Samuelson’s neoclassical economics were less ideological in the sense that he was less likely to raise principled (ideological) objections to government interference in the marketplace and preferred measuring the effectiveness or fallibility of different actions.


40. Ibid., ix.

41. Ibid., 201.


44. Time, August 3, 1936 (cover story). Charles Taft “approves of public works, regulation of public utilities (including government ‘yardsticks’), easy farm and home credit and a more equitable distribution of the nation’s wealth.”
45. In November of 1951, when Senator Taft was the favorite to win the Republican Party nomination for president (before Eisenhower announced his own candidacy), the New York Times ran a story entitled “Taft Brothers of Ohio: A Study in Contrasts.” Despite their political and personality differences (Robert stiff and shy, Charles gregarious and charming), the article concluded, the two Republican siblings ultimately were loyal to each other and that there was no rift between them. New York Times, November 18, 1951.


47. Ibid., xiii.
48. Ibid., xiii, 10.
49. Ibid., xi.
50. Ibid., vii.
51. Ibid., xi, vii.
52. Ibid., xi.
53. Ibid., xii (“in God we trust” was not placed on coins by the founders of America; it first appeared on a two-cent coin during the Civil War), 13, 13–16, 157, 208–9, 15, 16.
54. Ibid., 217.
57. Ibid., 15.
60. Ibid., 150, 153.
61. Ibid., 154–55 (emphasis added).
62. More than 40 years after Flynn announced that a domestic “social war” had followed on the heels of World War II, presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan told the Republican National Convention in 1992 that a “culture war” had broken out the year after the collapse of the Soviet Union. “There is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself. And in that struggle for the soul of America…” Just as had Flynn, Pat Buchanan did not describe his domestic-war opponents as merely misguided and certainly not in the language of Christian charity, but as pollutants who are deliberately seeking to destroy their country.

The agenda Clinton & Clinton would impose on America—abortion on demand, a litmus test for the Supreme Court, homosexual rights, discrimination against religious schools, women in combat—that’s change, all right. But it is not the kind of change America wants. It is not the kind of change America needs. And it is not the kind of change we can tolerate in a nation that we still call God’s country.

... We stand with President Bush in favor of the right of small towns and communities to control the raw sewage of pornography that pollutes our popular culture.

...
My friends, this election is about much more than who gets what. It is about who we are. It is about what we believe. It is about what we stand for as Americans.


68. At the FCC’s final meeting in December 1950, a banner was draped above the dais proclaiming “This Nation Under God”—three and one half years before Congress inserted “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance. Martin E. Marty, Modern American Religion vol. 3, Under God, Indivisible: 1941–1960 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 272 (reprinting a photograph of the meeting).


70. [FCC], Chairman’s Final Report to the Members of the National Lay Committee (1955), 32.


73. Ibid.

74. 152 Cong. Rec., 109th Cong., 2nd sess. (December 6, 2006), H8793-94 “Honoring the Life of Milton Friedman.”

75. At the beginning of his speech, the person who helped launch the conservative movement that would be influential in the presidency of Ronald Reagan said “there is still no better name than liberal....” The Collected Works of F.A. Hayek, In The Fortunes of Liberalism ed. Peter G. Klein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), vol. 4, 237 (speech delivered April 1, 1947).

76. President Ronald Reagan, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1981.

77. President Bill Clinton, State of the Union Address, January 23, 1996.


Part III. Deploying America’s “Spiritual Weapons” Abroad


Chapter 7. Guatemala: Coups and Consequences

1. A chronology of the coup is found in Appendix II. “PB” was a CIA “digraph” that signified “Guatemala.” It would have been possible at the time for the CIA to have had dozens of simultaneous PB operations, ranging in size from a single intercept of a
diplomat’s telephone line or the photo-surveillance of a particular embassy to a major operation to overthrow the government, such as PBSUCCESS. For an important study of the role of the CIA in the Guatemala coup of 1954, see Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 93–115.


4. *New York Times*, June 18, 1952. The *Times* quoted unnamed “observers” as stating that “feudal-minded landowners of Guatemala have a large share of responsibility for the present situation.”

5. For estates between 224 and 672 acres in size, uncultivated lands would be expropriated only if they constituted more than two-thirds of the total estate. Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944–1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 150. The Washington Mall (between the Capitol Building and the Lincoln Memorial is approximately 200 acres. A square mile is approximately 640 acres. It was estimated that 1,710 estates would be affected by the new law (a numerically miniscule one out of every 300 pieces of privately owned land), although these 1700 estates comprised a whopping 50 percent of total privately owned land in the country. Ibid., 152.


7. Ignoring the fact that for tax purposes United Fruit had claimed that its uncultivated land was worth only $1,185,000 in 1951, but that the same land should be valued at $19,355,000 for expropriation purposes in 1952, the United States took the side of United Fruit. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 164. Despite its complaints, the next year proved to be a very successful one for United Fruit, which was a result in no small part from good weather. The year 1953 saw the highest number of banana exports since 1948. The official CIA history of the period notes that United Fruit “continued to report only a fraction of the value of its land and exports for tax purposes…” Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala 1952–1954* (Stanford University Press, 1999), 15. See also 23.

8. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 214. Curiously, in light of later events, Decree 900 did not provoke a negative response from State Department officials who were contemporaneously tracking developments, while some international observers even applauded the progressive direction in which Guatemala was moving. Ibid., 152. In retrospect it should be acknowledged that however advanced Decree 900 might have been perceived at the time it was adopted, it had many shortcomings both in conception and implementation. Ibid., 153–54. On the whole, however, it seems to have been reasonably effective in accomplishing its goals and during the short time in which it was in effect did not cause the harms its opponents predicted. Ibid., 158–63.


10. Ibid., 15. Ironically, at the same time that the U.S. State Department was helping to overthrow the Arbenz government in part because of its efforts to limit the power and
influence of the United Fruit Company, the U.S. Department of Justice successfully prosecuted the United Fruit Company for antitrust violations in order to limit its power and influence in the United States. The United Fruit Company had been under investigation for possible antitrust violations since 1919. At the urging of the U.S. State Department in 1951, the Justice Department suspended a planned prosecution of United Fruit in 1951. Under President Eisenhower, the Justice Department prepared an antitrust suit to break up United Fruit’s monopolistic practices. United Fruit’s influence in the State Department remained sufficiently strong, however, that it asked the Department to intervene on its behalf with the Justice Department. After this extraordinary request, the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs (headed by John Moors Cabot) recommended that the Justice Department “reconsider” the suit on the grounds of the “tangible repercussions on this company’s business and possibly other American investments in Latin America.” The Bureau of Inter-American Affairs apparently did not raise the question of the potential effect of United Fruit’s alleged monopolistic practices on the people of Guatemala and Honduras, or on the American consumer.

11. Ibid., 16.


13. William Manchester, American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur 1880–1964 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1978), 507, 508–9. The person who was responsible for drafting the law was Wolf Ladejinsky from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Later President Eisenhower’s Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson, fired Ladejinsky—the author of the law that MacArthur described as being “extraordinarily successful”—because he was a “security risk.” Ibid., 508.

14. In 1952, the younger Somoza was the head of Nicaragua’s National Guard and the second-most powerful man in the country. When the elder Somoza was assassinated in 1956, Somoza Debayle become the president of Nicaragua. Like his father, the younger Somoza was to become a dictator who received financial support from the United States government—particularly in his battle against the Sandinistas. Also like his father, he would be assassinated.


18. Ibid. Although there are few records of this meeting, Truman immediately accepted the idea and issued orders to the CIA to cooperate with Somoza. The operation was to be financed by the CIA, but carried out jointly through the efforts of Guatemalan rebel (and later president) Carlos Castillo Armas, Somoza’s military, and agents of the United Fruit Company. FRUS, 1952–1954, Guatemala, 1. For the background of the first two coups attempts, operating under code-name PBFOURTE, see the standard history of the period, Gleijeses, Shattered Hope, 228–31 and the CIA’s internal history, Cullather, Secret History, 28–34.

19. The United States and Guatemala both ratified the charter of the United Nations in 1945, the year that it came into effect. In 1951, the United States and Guatemala ratified the charter of the Organization of American States, which came into effect later that year. Charter of the Organization of American States, 119 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force December 13, 1951. At the time that the Truman and Eisenhower administrations undertook actions to overthrow the Guatemalan government, the core of the two countries’
international obligations and commitments to each other were contained in these two multinational charters and they explicitly forbade military interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

22. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 213.
30. Ibid., 214 (quoting Anita Frankel).
31. Ibid., 211.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 211–12.
34. The papal nuncio from Italy, Genaro Verolino, unlike the archbishop and the American priest, was not opposed to Decree 900, which he thought might help lessen poverty in the country, though his voice was drowned out by others in the church. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 212. For another perspective on Rossell Arellano, which fully acknowledges his “bitter opposition to communism” anti-communism but stresses also his support of some reforms, see Turner, *Catholicism and Political Development in Latin America*, 131–35.
35. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 212 (quoting original, published in a magazine in the United States in June 1954, at the very moment that the American-led coup was underway in Guatemala).
36. Ibid., 210. Coincidentally, a classified U.S. government analysis of the Guatemalan church used the same term “implacable” to characterize the church’s opposition to communism:

The Catholic hierarchy in Guatemala is implacably opposed to Communism, but the Church has been excluded from an active role in national affairs since the late Nineteenth Century. Moreover, the Church is handicapped by the meagerness of its resources, the small number of priests in proportion to population, the fact that most priests are aliens subject to deportation, and the lack of a program capable of competing with the Communist-led labor movement or with Agrarian Reform.


40. Historians sharply disagree about the importance of the role and influence of the United Fruit Company in the CIA’s coup-planning in 1953 and 1954, with the tendency increasingly being to discount any important role of the company. The classic source arguing for a prominent role of United Fruit in promoting the attempted coup is Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (New York: Anchor Books, 1983), which was originally published in 1982. Since the publication of *Bitter Fruit*, a significant number of documents have been declassified and published, and several important studies have now questioned whether United Fruit played any important role at all. For those minimizing the role of United Fruit see particularly Cullather, *Secret History* and Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, especially 362, where he concludes that the U.S. government’s concern with Guatemala “owed little to the company.” Like John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Company, the United Fruit long served as a symbol for many—particularly on the political left—of multinational power and exploitation of workers and peoples. The company, fairly or unfairly, also served as a useful propaganda tool for Fidel Castro in the late 1950s when he held it up to Cuban revolutionaries as the exemplar of corporate greed and exploitation of the Cuban people.

While the most plausible evidence points to no direct United Fruit involvement in the coup, that is an entirely different matter from the extent to which U.S. government officials and the American public sympathized with company as a victim of communist-inspired actions and equated United Fruit’s economic interests with the interests of the United States in the Cold War. Many now-declassified CIA documents reveal a clear American interest in the economic health of United Fruit and the dangers that communism and worker unrest posed to it, as well as to other American commercial interests in the country (such as the International Railways of Central America). U.S. embassy officials had repeatedly intervened with the Guatemalan government on behalf of the economic interests of United Fruit and the other American companies doing business in Guatemala. *FRUS, 1952–1954, vol. IV, American Republics*, 1032 (“Future political developments will depend in large measure on the outcome of the conflict between Guatemala and the United Fruit Company”). National Intelligence Estimate NIE-62, March 11, 1952, reveals a particular concern over the circumstances of United Fruit, which it reports “dominates Guatemalan banana production” and “controls the only effective system of internal transportation.” Ibid., 1035. See also *FRUS, 1952–1954, Guatemala*, 2 (communists have been “trying to aggravate the United Fruit Company’s labor troubles”) [King to Wisner, Jan. 11, 1952]. Cullather, *Secret History*, 19.

41. See Chapter 1 above and Cullather, *Secret History*, 28–34. The first two operations were codenamed PBFORTUNE.

42. See Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 246.

43. Ibid., 221.

44. Cullather, *Secret History*, 42.

45. Ibid., 49.


47. David Atlee Phillips was a CIA officer who played a key role in the radio propaganda campaign. His explanation in *The Night Watch* of how the CIA’s radio broadcasts (falsely) described rebel military successes and a popular uprising descending on
Guatemala City has a surreal quality to it not unlike Orson Wells’s 1938 fictional radio broadcast *The War of the Worlds* that was taken very seriously by many in his listening audience. David Atlee Phillips, *The Night Watch* (New York: Atheneum, 1977).

49. *Time*, April 26, 1954. Gleijeses translates the letter as follows:

We again raise our voice to alert Catholics that anti-Christian communism—the worst atheist doctrine of all time—is stalking our country under the cloak of social justice. We warn you that those whom the communists help today, they will condemn to forced labor and terrible suffering tomorrow. Everyone who loves his country must fight against those who—loyal to no country, the scum of the earth—have repaid Guatemala’s generous hospitality by fomenting class hatred, in preparation for the day of destruction and slaughter which they anticipate with such enthusiasm…. Guatemala must rise as one against this enemy of God and country.

Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 287 (translated from the Spanish “original”).

52. John Cooney, *The American Pope* (New York: Dell, 1984), 299–300. Spellman became Metropolitan Archbishop of New York in 1939, the same year that Mariano Rossell y Arellano became Metropolitan Archbishop of Guatemala. Spellman had long been a firm supporter of Latin American dictators and had “wined and dined” with Batista, Trujillo, Stroessner, and Somoza. Ibid., 298. For CIA records suggesting its role in contacting Spellman and preparing the pastoral letter, see *FRUS*, 1952–1954, *Guatemala*, 194 (doc. 100), 252 (doc. 133); Cullather, *Secret History*, 65 n.93 (suggesting that because the Agency did not have ties to the Catholic Church in Guatemala it looked to others to make contacts). For further information, see also Rodolfo Cardenal, S.J., “Radical Conservatism and the Challenge of the Gospel in Guatemala,” in *Church and Politics in Latin America*, ed. Dermot Keogh (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 208.

60. Ibid., 260.
61. Ibid., 262. As early as 1950, even before the Agrarian Law was enacted, the United Fruit Company’s public relations ace Edward Bernays “laid down a PR barrage that sent correspondents from *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* to report on Communist activities in Guatemala.” Cullather, *Secret History*, 18.
64. *Time*, June 14, 1954.

69. Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 128. More conservative sources were even more alarmist. Writing in early 1953, Ralph de Toledano, who was an early supporter of Whittaker Chambers and later a regular contributor to *National Review*, published an immensely provocative article entitled “The Soft Underbelly of the U.S.A.” in *American Mercury* in 1953, in which he described Guatemala as a “Soviet beachhead” where communists had “set up shop” consisting of “a great espionage, sabotage, and propaganda organization [that] works day and night for the Soviet Union….” Within weeks after the coup, Daniel James published *Red Design for the Americas: Guatemalan Prelude* (New York: The John Day Company, 1954). Had it been published a year earlier, it would have provided rhetorical support for a coup; its arrival shortly afterwards, left it in the position of justifying the coup and warning of future dangers.


71. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 248. While many of the underlying circumstances were quite different, the lead-up to the Second Gulf War in 2003 also saw American political figures and the American press similarly characterizing the U.S. government as being patient and long-suffering while Iraq was being provocative and a threat to American national security interests.


73. Ibid., 7–9, 95–104.

74. Ibid., 109; Phillips, *The Night Watch*, 62–64. Phillips, a CIA officer, played a key role in the radio broadcasts, which his book recounts among other CIA exploits. He became a legend within the Agency based in part on his reputation from Guatemala. Though the *Night Watch* makes for entertaining reading and provides insight into CIA activities, it should be taken with a grain of salt.


76. Ibid., 119–22.


79. Ibid., 110.


86. Ibid.

87. In the words of CIA’s own internal history, the new American-supported government of Castillo Armas selected José Bernabé Linares [the pre-1944 government’s] hated secret police chief, to head the new regime’s security forces. Linares soon banned all “subversive” literature, including works by Victor Hugo and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Castillo Armas completed his lunge to the right by disfranchising illiterates (two-thirds of the electorate), canceling land reform, and outlawing all political parties, labor confederations, and peasant organizations. Finally, he decreed a “political statute” that voided the 1945 constitution and gave him complete executive and legislative authority. Cullather, *Secret History*, 113.
The first National Intelligence Estimate of Guatemala after the coup, issued on July 26, 1955, offered some criticisms of the Castillo Armas government. In one of its observations, that properly should be characterized as lying somewhere being condescendingly smug and shockingly outrageous, it reported about the government that it had installed through a military coup: “Guatemalan politicians are disposed to indulge in intrigue against the government in power rather than to rely upon normal democratic processes to achieve their objectives.” Ibid. Rather than blaming the United States government for overthrowing a democratically elected government and installing what already was becoming a dictatorship, it suggests that it was in the nature of Guatemalan people to act in such a corrupt way. If only they could be more like the Americans.

A year later, *Time* magazine reported the inconvenient fact that the importing firm, Comercial Guatemalteca, had given a check worth $25,000 to President Castillo Armas, who hitherto had not been known for being wealthy. Castillo Armas explained, unconvincing to his erstwhile supporters in the American press, that the check was merely the repayment of a personal loan from the head of the company. He could not explain to *Time*’s satisfaction why a personal loan from the company’s head was paid by the company and not by the man to whom he had loaned the money. With a little digging, *Time* magazine learned that the Castillo Armas government had secretly decided to end import tariffs on corn just as Comercial Guatmalteca went into the corn import business. And in a last bit of inconvenient information, the company in fact did not deliver the corn that the government had purchased. (*Time* August 22, 1955). While *Time* did not approve of these shenanigans, it did not condemn the new government for having been “capitalist-infiltrated.” Two years later, after Castillo Armas was assassinated by one of his guards, *Time* noted that under his government, “graft, always present, kept pace with prosperity.” President Eisenhower issued a statement referring to the president’s death as “a great loss to his own nation and to the entire free world. President Castillo Armas was a personal friend of mine.” *Time*, August 5, 1957. Three years later *Time* magazine, the one-time cheerleader for Castillo Armas, finally acknowledged that the coup was in fact orchestrated by the CIA rather than by the plucky and lucky colonel, and that he in fact led a “corrupt regime.” *Time*, May 23, 1960. But Americans were no longer paying any attention.

88. “Agreement on the establishment of the Commission to clarify past human rights violations and acts of violence that have caused the Guatemalan population to suffer,” Oslo, June 23, 1994. For Hernández, the CEH had begun five years earlier on a positive note. The 1994 Accord of Oslo brought together the ruling military government of the Republic of Guatemala together with the opposition force Unidad Revolucionaria Racional Guatemalteca in an effort to put an end to 50 years of fighting.


90. For example: “The violence is reaching new levels even for Guatemala, where left and right have been at bloody odds since a CIA-sponsored coup… in 1954” and “anonymous death squads, sent out by both sides….” *Time*, January 25, 1982 (the article nevertheless focuses its attention on “the guerrillas’ major strongholds” and assures readers that the government is confident that the “guerrillas can be beaten…."


92. Ibid.
Whilst anti-communism, promoted by the United States within the framework of its foreign policy, received firm support from right-wing political parties and from various other powerful actors in Guatemala, the United States demonstrated that it was willing to provide support for strong military regimes in its strategic backyard. In the case of Guatemala, military assistance was directed towards reinforcing the national intelligence apparatus and for training the officer corps in counterinsurgency techniques, key factors which had significant bearing on human rights violations during the armed confrontation.

Anti-communism and the National Security Doctrine (DSN) formed part of the anti-Soviet strategy of the United States in Latin America. In Guatemala, these were first expressed as anti-reformist, then anti-democratic policies, culminating in criminal counterinsurgency. The National Security Doctrine fell on fertile ground in Guatemala where anti-communist thinking had already taken root and from the 1930s, had merged with the defence of religion, tradition and conservative values, all of which were allegedly threatened by the world-wide expansion of atheistic communism. Until the 1950s, these views were strongly supported by the Catholic Church, which qualified as communist any position that contradicted its philosophy, thus contributing even further to division and confusion in Guatemalan society.


1. “Report on the First 100 Days.” Though the message was issued by Diem, it may well have been written by Edward Lansdale. Jonathan Nashel, Edward Lansdale’s Cold War (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 116, 247. Lansdale also may have been responsible for a similar “100 day” message delivered by Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky in 1965: “But the most important aspect of communism is that communism is anti-God.” Ibid., 247.


93. Ibid.
94. CEH, Memory of Silence, para. 82.
95. Ibid, para. 87.
96. Ibid., para. 90.
97. Ibid., Prologue and paras. 108–23, 125. A total of 83 percent of the total number of victims were Mayan. para. 1.
98. Ibid., para. 126.
101. CEH, Memory of Silence, paras. 82, 128.
102. Ibid., para. 3.
103. Ibid., paras. 9–12.
104. The CEH concluded that:

105. Ibid., para. 11. (See also paras. 5, 9, 12).
The “Pentagon Papers” is a 47-volume study prepared by the U.S. Department of Defense in response to an order issued by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in 1967 to prepare an “encyclopedic and objective” study of the involvement of the United States in Vietnam from the 1940s to 1967. The top secret report was drafted by a 36-person task force headed by Assistant Secretary Leslie Gelb and was completed in January 1969. A copy of the report was sent to the RAND Corporation, an institution that had long conducted research for the U.S. government. Two employees of RAND, Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony J. Russo, decided by 1969 that most of the “Pentagon Papers” should be made public. They made an unauthorized photocopy of 43 of the volumes but did not copy the four volumes that pertained to (then) ongoing negotiations between the North Vietnamese and the United States. They gave some of the photocopies to the New York Times, which began publishing excerpts in June 1971. The Washington Post started publishing some of the papers immediately afterwards. (The subjects that were at that time of the highest interest involved the circumstances surrounding the so-called “Gulf of Tonkin incident” in 1964 and whether President Lyndon B. Johnson had publicly misrepresented the events in order to provide a justification for a massive increase in U.S. military action in Vietnam.) Once the Times began to publish the papers, President Nixon ordered the Justice Department to obtain a court order to stop publication. The attorney at the Justice Department responsible for attempting to obtain the order was William H. Rehnquist. The U.S. Supreme Court ultimately refused to issue an injunction to stop publication. New York Times Co. v. United States, 403 U.S. 713 (1971). Later that year Rehnquist was nominated and then confirmed as an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Pentagon Papers have been published in several different and inconsistent formats, which has contributed to some confusion. The original 47-volume version prepared by the Department of Defense has never been made public in its entirety. The single most extensive version was published in 1971 in 12 volumes by the Committee on Armed Services of the U.S. House of Representatives and will be cited here as the Pentagon Papers House Committee Print. While the House Committee Print is the most lengthy of any published version, it is not comprehensive and does not include some documents available in other published versions. The organization of the 12 volumes is convoluted and begins to make sense only after some concerted study of its organizational structure. The original 47 volumes (most of which were less than 100 pages in length) were hand typed and were organized into six Roman numeral parts I through VI that cross the entire work. Four of the six parts (I–IV) appear in volume 1 of the House Committee Print, with part IV stretching from volumes 1 through 7. The pagination is not continuous, but reflects the numbering of the original 47 volumes. Thus, for example, the citation referenced above, vol. 2, IV.A.4, 76, refers to volume 2 of the House Committee Print, and page 76 of Part IV.A.4 of that volume. It can be both confusing and time-consuming to make sense of the arrangement of these volumes that are organized neither chronologically nor entirely by subject matter. Unfortunately, no reputable source has ever published all available materials in a more workable format.

Many, but far from all, of the original Pentagon Papers are now available in PDF format online. The single best source is provided by Clemson University at http://www.clemson.edu/caah/history/facultypages/EdMoise/pentagon.html. While this is the most comprehensive source, it too presents the material in a confusing manner. The Clemson version generally tracks the organization of the House Committee Print version, but there are some exceptions and surprising (and frustrating) omissions and inconsistencies.

The citation format used here is based on the House Committee Print and the originals may all be found at any library with the full 12 volumes. Most, but not all of the passages
cited from the House Committee Print can be found online—though whenever there is an inconsistency between the online version and the more accurate original Committee version, the latter is followed.

Although the Pentagon Papers have been reprinted by several different publishers, the only other near-complete version was published by Beacon Press. In 1971, as the controversy over publishing the documents was being contested, then Senator Mike Gravel of Alaska submitted approximately 4,000 pages to the Congressional Record, believing that publication by the U.S. government printing office would undermine efforts to suppress their release. Beacon Press thereupon republished the “Gravel version” as The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 5 vols. “Senator Gravel Edition.” Unlike the House Committee Print, which reproduced photocopies of the originals, the Senator Gravel edition has been entirely reformatted—which makes the text easier to read but lacking in some of the immediacy of the originals.

3. The “who lost China?” recriminations of American politics “haunted American policymakers from Harry Truman to Richard Nixon.” George C. Herring, America’s Longest War, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2002), xiii. Eisenhower’s 1952 presidential campaign had been aided in no small part by popular attacks on the Truman administration’s alleged failure to respond sufficiently aggressively to the increasing threat of communism and, incongruously, on the hope that Five-Star General Eisenhower would know how to extricate American soldiers from the quagmire of Korea.

4. U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, Indochina (Washington, DC: GPO, 1982), 949 (January 8, 1954). See also, for example, comment at press conference on February 10, 1954 (response to Daniel Schorr, Pentagon Papers Gravel Edition, vol. 1, 593. A few weeks later, Vice President Richard Nixon similarly made an ominous warning about using the American military to fight Ho. The “situation in Southeast is currently the most important issue facing the United States. It relates to a war we might have to fight in the future and that we might lose” (as paraphrased by the New York Times, April 17, 1954).

5. This came in response to a question posed by Secretary of Treasury George Humphrey, who queried: “‘Suppose the French were to give up and turn the whole country over to the Communists. Would the United States then interfere?’ The President replied no, we would not intervene...” FRUS, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, Indochina, 949 (January 8, 1954).


8. Herring, America’s Longest War, 45.


10. Herring, America’s Longest War, 45.


12. New York Times, April 7, 1954. The New York Times article announcing the request from Congress stated that the “request shifted the emphasis of foreign aid from Europe to the Far East...” Although there is no hard and fast evidence that the dramatic increase in a financial commitment to Vietnam was linked directly to the appointment of Diem, it is difficult to imagine that the timing was purely coincidental. For a recent and

13. Quoted in Herring, America’s Longest War, 60.


16. For a list of all the attendees at the lunch meeting, see Miller, “Vision, Power and Agency,” 446 n.41. For a deeply researched and highly insightful look at Diem and U.S. foreign policy, see Seth Jacobs, America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

17. Mark Moyar’s revisionist account makes the case that by 1954 Diem was a much more serious and significant person than has traditionally been thought. Mark Moyar, Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Moyar seems to adopt the position that Diem was the best available candidate to have become premier in 1954, thus echoing the position of Diem’s strongest supporters of 1954. In support of this case, Moyar notes that Diem had been a brilliant student graduating at the top of his class, that he immediately became a successful administrator in Vietnam, and that both Bao Dai and Ho Chi Minh had previously offered him important positions in their respective governments. Ibid., esp. 12–13 and 33–36. The position taken by Moyar is thus akin to that of Wesley Fishel and Edward Lansdale between 1950 and 1961.

18. Diem had four brothers. One, Khoi, was killed by communists before 1954. The oldest, Thuc, became the archbishop. Luyen became Diem’s ambassador to London. Nhu became the head of state security and was murdered at the same time as Diem. The last was Can, who became the political leader of Vietnam in the northern part of South Vietnam, where the former imperial city of Huế was located. Miller, “Vision, Power and Agency,” 447–49.

19. Cardinal Spellman, like many others, originally was more impressed by Diem’s older brother than by Diem himself. In a meeting at the State Department in 1950, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs Dean Rusk, later to become Kennedy’s secretary of state, similarly had been impressed by the older brother. Rusk apparently did not remember this well-documented meeting, as his memoirs inaccurately record that the first meeting with Diem was in 1957. Rusk, As I Saw It (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990), 436. For Rusk’s 1950 cable reporting on the earlier meeting with the Ngo brothers, see Jacobs, America’s Miracle Man, 27.

20. Senator McCarthy was a frequent visitor at Hyannisport in the early 1950s and he dated two of Senator Kennedy’s sisters, Eunice and Pat, and hired his younger brother, Bobby, to work on the communist-hunting Senate Subcommittee on Investigations.


22. The events then occurring in Vietnam were subsequently described in the famous novel The Quiet American that was at that moment being written by the British novelist Graham Greene. For the relationship between Greene’s personal experiences in Vietnam and his novel, see Norman Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, 1939–1955 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), 398–434. The novel was published in Britain in late 1955 and in early 1956 in America. The Quiet American tells the story of Alden Pyle, a young, Harvard-educated, CIA officer who, with no practical knowledge of Vietnam, its language, or its history, nevertheless believes that he knows how to solve Indochina’s problems. Pyle is
an intentionally two-dimensional character who is used to caricature the Americans’ naïve belief that they can find a “third force” in Vietnam that is neither the brutal colonialism of the French nor the brutal communism of Ho Chi Minh. Pyle believes that he has identified the leader of that “third force” in the person of General Trinh Minh Thé, who was not only a character in Greene’s novel, but was a real person in Vietnam in the early 1950s. The American government later would, as imagined by Greene in his novel, provide military assistance to General Thé and others in promotion of its third-force idea. In both the novel and the real world, General Thé headed the armed militia of the Cao Dai religion. (The major religious groups of the time, including the Catholics, the Hoa Hao, and the Buddhists, each had its own private armed militia.) General Thé, in an act of deadly cynicism, detonated several bombs in a busy square in Saigon in 1952 and falsely accused the communists of having committed the atrocity. In the novel, Greene implies that the CIA supplied the deadly explosives to General Thé. (Although Greene himself seems to have believed it was true, it probably was not.) Thus General Thé’s “third force” in Greene’s novel, earnestly promoted by naïve, well-meaning, and ultimately dangerous American intelligence agents, turns out to be just as brutal and cynical as those whom it seeks to destroy. The New York Times coverage of the actual incident, on January 25, 1952, specifically refers to General Thé as a proponent of the “third force.”

During the year that Greene began working on his novel about counterproductive American efforts to promote a third force in the fictional Vietnam (1952–53), the real-world Diem and his patron, Cardinal Spellman, were assiduously promoting Diem as a potential third-force leader who was both virulently anticommunist and fiercely anticolonialist.

Greene began his novel on his second visit to Vietnam, which began in October 1951—the same month that the young Congressman Jack Kennedy first visited Vietnam with his brother, Bobby. It is perhaps unfortunate that the young congressman and the famous novelist did not meet. Both had a profound sense of irony and both ultimately distrusted simple solutions. Although Congressman Kennedy initially believed in the third force, he later became increasingly skeptical that the United States could ever accomplish its wish to identify accurately and prop up a third force to solve the problems of Vietnam.

In a strange turn of events, American film producer Frank Mankiewicz purchased the film rights to The Quiet American but turned the meaning of the novel completely on its head. For the British novelist, the American Pyle was responsible for bringing harm to Vietnam; in the American film version he became the hero. Mankiewicz’s film version of the 1955 novel, which was released in 1958 after Diem’s triumphal visit to the United States in 1957, completely inverted Greene’s message. The naïvely dangerous protagonist of the novel, the quiet American Alden Pyle, became the film’s unabashed protagonist, played by the World War II hero Audie Murphy. Murphy’s photo was placed on the cover of Life magazine at the time of his discharge from the service in 1945. In 1955, he played himself in the movie version of his life, To Hell and Back, which became the highest-grossing film to date produced by Universal Studios (surpassed only 20 years later with the release of Steven Spielberg’s Jaws). Murphy’s grave in Arlington National Cemetery was for many years the second most visited after that of John F. Kennedy.

In the original novel, British author Graham Greene portrays Pyle as a foil who symbolizes the American attitudes to Vietnam in the 1950s: naïve, overly self-confident, and ultimately very dangerous. In the American movie version, however, Pyle (Murphy) is transformed into the hero who is mild-mannered, well-intentioned towards the Vietnamese people, but who is able to apply deadly force skillfully when it becomes necessary.
The film begins with an explanatory statement by General Walter Bedell Smith (the former head of the CIA), not altogether unlike DeMille’s personal appearance at the beginning of the *Ten Commandments*.

Rather than protesting American support for the third force in Vietnam, the movie supports Pyle’s efforts and praises Diem as being the Vietnamese leader of the third force. In a scene in the movie that is not in the novel, Alden (Audie) describes having met a “prominent” Vietnamese man living in exile in New Jersey (an obvious reference to Diem) whom he hopes will one day become the leader of Vietnam upon its achieving independence.

Edward Lansdale, who led CIA operations in Vietnam, served as the technical adviser to the film, and assisted in the revision of the lines of the fictional character that was to some extent based on him. Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man*, 110, Nashel, *Edward Lansdale’s Cold War*, 163–72.

23. One billion dollars in 1954 currency was approximately equivalent to seven billion dollars at the time of the launching of the second Iraq war in 2003.


27. Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man*, 52. Some of the records cited by Jacobs are now missing from the National Archives.

28. Ibid., 53.


31. Ibid., 843.

32. Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 60. The (unnamed) author of the *Pentagon Papers* study of Diem, who was not privy to all background material, was unable to explain how or why Diem was appointed prime minister. *Pentagon Papers House Committee Print*, vol. 2, IV.A.5 tab 2, 10–11.


34. According to Seth Jacobs, Bao Dai acknowledged that the reason he chose the unpopular Diem was because of American influence. Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man*, 53. Although it has been suggested—including by Bao Dai himself much later—that the United States pressured Bao Dai to name Diem, declassified State Department records do not record American diplomats as pressuring Bao Dai to appoint Diem. See, for example, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, vol. XIII, Indochina and *FRUS, 1952–54*, vol. XVI, Geneva Conference.

35. Miller, “Vision, Power and Agency,” 455 (quoting Bao Dai’s memoirs). For the role of Diem’s family, particularly his brother Nhu, see ibid., 447–454.


37. Ibid., 55.


39. The lyrics of one of the tunes used in the Lansdale-orchestrated election of Magsaysay went as follows:

    We want our native land to lie
    Peaceful and clean again

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We want our nation guided by
God-fearing honest men!

Nashel, Edward Lansdale’s Cold War, 34.
40. Ibid., 31–48.
42. Quoted in Nashel, Edward Lansdale’s Cold War, 53.
43. Pentagon Papers House Committee Print, IV.B.1, 12.
44. He served on two major tours of duty in South Vietnam, the first coinciding with the first year and a half of Diem’s premiership and the second during the Johnson administration after Diem’s assassination.
46. Nashel, Edward Lansdale’s Cold War, 13.
47. Ibid., 14.
48. Ibid., 51.
49. Pentagon Papers House Committee Print, vol. 2, IV.A.2 tab 1, 2 citing Final Declaration of Accords.
51. Ibid., 1478.
53. Ibid., 1840.
54. Ibid., 1880.
55. Ibid., 1881.
56. Herring, America’s Longest War, 57.
57. See Jacobs, America’s Miracle Man, 127ff. The U.S. Navy and the CIA were not the only American institutions that became deeply involved in the effort to move Catholics (and others) to the south. Private charities, including notably Catholic Relief Services, CARE, and the International Rescue Committee sent workers to help with the infusion of refugees and to provide economic development programs as well. Herring, America’s Longest War, 68–69. Leo Cherne, as head of the International Rescue Committee (and formerly an intelligence official) sent out a telegram to his contacts urging them to support the relocation efforts in Vietnam that made clear that the movement was not simply to provide humanitarian relief, but to get the right people into the south to buttress the Diem government. In cableese:

IF VIETNAM GOES COMMUNIST ASIA LOST…KEY TO VICTORY ONE HALF MILLION ANTI COMMUNIST REFUGEES FROM COMMUNIST NORTH NOW BEING MOVED US NAVY PRIVATE SHIPS AIRCRAFT ETC.

Quoted in Nashel, Edward Lansdale’s Cold War, 60. Catholic charities in the United States similarly sent representatives to Vietnam to aid their co-religionists and to publicize what was happening in the Catholic press. In 1954, the Catholic press was particularly encouraged in having found a navy “doctor” who was a Catholic and who was helping in Operation Passage to Freedom. With the assistance of Edward Lansdale and Cardinal Spellman, this sailor, like Diem, would be plucked from obscurity and soon would be known throughout the United States.
Believing in the international propaganda value of seeing people vote with their feet, the United States not only planted false stories in the north to convince people to leave, “primarily through another propaganda campaign” it encouraged people to stay in the south. Pentagon Papers House Committee Print, vol. 2, IV.B.1,12.

59. Cited in Jacobs, America’s Miracle Man, 133.
61. Ibid., 579.

62. He did, however, boast of his ability to influence the editorial content of South Vietnamese editorials by carefully placing bribes in the hands of the Vietnamese mistress of a French official. Pentagon Papers Gravel Edition, vol. 1, 582.
63. Nashel, Edward Lansdale’s Cold War, 60.
66. Pentagon Papers House Committee Print, vol. 2, IV.A.5 tables 1, 10; Jacobs, America’s Miracle Man, 131.
67. Pentagon Papers House Committee Print, vol. 2, IV.A.5 table 1, 1.
68. Jacobs, America’s Miracle Man, 131.

71. See pp. 84–85. One of Collins’s later duties was to be a pall bearer at the funeral of Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1969 in Washington, D.C.

73. Years later, Collins, a Texan, used a Civil War analogy to describe the situation. He suggested that the North Vietnamese who came to the south during 1954–55 were like the Yankee carpetbaggers who went to southern states following the War Between the States.
75. Herring, America’s Longest War, 77.
81. Pentagon Papers House Committee Print, vol. 2, IV.A.5. tab 2, 42.
82. Herring, America’s Longest War, 60.
83. Lansdale engaged in other efforts to plant stories with the American press, though they were not as successful as those that will be described below. Lansdale regretted that his effort to convince visiting journalist Joseph Alsop of this Chinese slave-labor story by means of having a “defector” plant the story with the journalist did not succeed. Pentagon Papers Gravel Edition, vol. 1, 579. Though this particular effort to plant a false story with one journalist failed, Lansdale nevertheless was quite proud of the CIA’s collaborative relations with other American journalists.

Till and Peg Durdin of the N.Y. Times, Hank Lieberman of the N.Y. Times, Homer Bigart of the N.Y. Herald Tribune, John Mecklin of Life-Time, and John Roderick
of Associated Press, have been warm friends of [the CIA’s Saigon Military Mission] and worked hard to penetrate the fabric of French propaganda and give the U.S. an objective account of events in Vietnam. The group met with us at times to analyze objectives and motives of propaganda known to them, meeting at their own request as U.S. citizens. These mature and responsible news correspondents performed a valuable service for their country.

Ibid., 581. When some of these journalists later became suspicious of stories being fed to them by government officials, Lansdale ceased to think of them as “responsible correspondents.”

84. This was, of course, the same Lansdale who would shortly rewrite the movie script of The Quiet American to make Alden Pyle into a figure resembling more closely the attractive image Americans preferred rather than the dangerous Alden Pyle of the novel.


86. Ibid.—noting also the heavy involvement of U.S. private charities.

87. Quoted in Jacobs, America’s Miracle Man, 128.

88. Ibid., 129.

89. A similar publishing phenomenon occurred in 1961, when Edward Lansdale wrote a classified memorandum entitled “The Village That Refuses to Die” about one village’s resistance to communism. President Kennedy liked it so much that he ordered it to be declassified and it was published anonymously in the Saturday Evening Post. Nashel, Edward Lansdale’s Cold War, 54–55.

90. The three events that I best remember being associated with my sixth-grade year were the funeral of General Douglas MacArthur (which my teacher, a former army sergeant thought we should watch in class), the assassination of President Kennedy (whose funeral we did not watch), and the teacher’s reading of Tom Dooley’s book. Thomas A. Dooley, M.D., Deliver Us From Evil: The Story of Viet Nam’s Flight to Freedom (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956). This was my own first conscious introduction to Vietnam.


92. Fisher, Dr. America, 48.

93. Ibid., 60–61. Lansdale was also responsible for helping to establish Dooley in his second East Asian career, as a medical worker in Laos. Ibid., 100–1, 121, etc. Lansdale also helped smooth out some of Dooley’s personal difficulties. Ibid., 117.

94. Ibid., 73–74. Dooley thanked Lederer in his book, Dooley, Deliver Us From Evil, 213, but did not fully explain the crucial role that Lederer and Lansdale played in promoting the book. Fisher, Dr. America, 74–75.

95. Ibid.

96. Dooley, Deliver Us From Evil, viii.

97. Ibid., esp. 174–84.

98. Ibid., 31.

99. Ibid., 32.

100. Ibid., 209.

101. Ibid., 71–72 (capitalism); 210 (navy).

102. Fisher, Dr. America, 56.

103. The record was based on a folk ballad about a nineteenth-century man named Tom Dula, who was hanged for murder. Neither the Kingston Trio nor the navy doctor objected to the confusion in the public mind that helped promote everyone concerned. Dooley’s
biographer begins his book by describing a dinner in St. Louis in December 1959, attended by Prince Souphan of Laos, where Dooley received a check for $18,000 from the Jaycees to assist his medical relief work in Laos. Following the dinner, Dooley went to a night spot called the Chase Club to hear the Kingston Trio perform. The trio duly serenaded the real person whose name they had contributed to making famous. Ibid., 4–5. Millions of Americans never paid any attention to the lyrics of the song beyond its gripping opening refrain:

Hang down your head, Tom Dooley,
Hang down your head and cry,
Hang down your head, Tom Dooley,
Poor boy, you’re bound to die.

Dooley’s early death only three years later helped seal the song’s connection with the famed doctor.

104. According to his biographer, “no American played a larger role in announcing the arrival of South Vietnam as a new ally whose fate was decisively bound to that of the United States.” Fisher, Dr. America, 34.

105. Also granted honorary doctorates at Notre Dame in 1960 were President Eisenhower and Giovanni Cardinal Montini, the future Pope Paul VI.

106. For his notorious activities while ostensibly in medical school, see Fisher, Dr. America, 30–33.

107. Fisher, Dr. America, 55–58 (referring to his “obsession with publicity”).

108. Herring, America’s Longest War, 79.


110. “Dooley’s more lurid accounts of tortured priests earned him the permanent devotion of millions of Catholic Americans, but they infuriated functionaries at the United States Information Agency (USIA), who later dismissed the atrocities reported in Deliver Us from Evil as groundless.” Ibid., 54. See also 78–81.

111. In 1954, the United States did not declare its intention as to whether it would support democratic elections in Vietnam in 1956. But it did chose to back Ngo Dinh Diem, and one of the first items of business was to strengthen Diem’s support in Vietnam. The American ambassador in Paris, C. Douglas Dillon, informed the French government that the United States has “every wish to do what was possible to win the elections.” FRUS, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, Indochina, 1880. The urgency of developing support for Diem was readily apparent. Upon Diem’s arrival in Vietnam, the New York Times correspondent wrote that his “biggest problem, at the outset, is to obtain and rally popular support.” New York Times, June 26, 1954. It is in conjunction with the need to rally additional supporters that the simultaneous plans were launched to evacuate Diem’s likely supporters, the Catholics of North Vietnam, to the south.


115. Ibid.

116. NIE 63–56, July 17, 1956. The 1956 NIE reports that Diem had strengthened somewhat his position in the south through both his rendering impotent the sects and by the elections that he won in overwhelming numbers. An assessment of Diem’s popularity in 1959 was much more bleak, in reporting that he “has not generated widespread popular
enthusiasm.” NIE 63–59, May 26, 1959. The 1957 NIE, however, notes the diminishing popularity of the North Vietnamese government due in part to its harsh tactics—an error that it has acknowledged to itself. NIE 63.2–57, May 14, 1957. Nevertheless, the NIE notes that the government has taken efforts to reverse bad policies and it probably will again be able to regain its popularity.

120. Ibid., 6 (quoting American Friends of Vietnam publication of Robertson’s speech).
121. The Pentagon Papers argues that it is quite likely that the 80 percent favorable vote for Ho that Eisenhower estimated in 1954 would have been less by 1956, but they do not conclude that Diem ever could have won or that Ho would have lost. Pentagon Papers House Committee Print, vol. 2, IV.A.5 summary, 5–7.
122. The Pentagon Papers ends its discussion of the elections that were not held by first noting that at the concluding session of the Geneva Conference in 1954, North Vietnamese Deputy Premier Pham Van Dong said: “We shall achieve unity. We shall achieve it just as we have won the war. No force in the world, internal or external, can make us deviate from our path.” Pentagon Papers House Committee Print, vol. 2, IV.A.5 summary, 12. The report then noted the outcome: “Diem’s rejection of elections means that reunification could be achieved in the foreseeable future only by resort to force. Diem’s policy, and U.S. support of it, led inevitably to a test of strength with the DRV to determine whether the GVN’s cohesiveness, with U.S. support, could offset North Vietnam’s drive to satisfy its unrequited nationalism and expansionism.” Ibid.
123. Moyar, Triumph Forsaken, 77. During his trip, the media reported that South Vietnam received $250,000,000 per year, though the figure may have been significantly higher when all military and clandestine aid is included.
126. Ibid.
127. Ibid.
128. See Herring, America’s Longest War, 63–66; Pentagon Papers House Committee Print, vol. 2, IV.A.5 tab 2, 5–9, 11–12, 18–19.
132. Ibid.
136. Ibid.
137. Ibid.
138. Ibid.
139. New York Times, May 12, 1957. In a curious defense of Diem, Professor Mark Moyar ridiculed the French-educated liberals who populated the cafés of Saigon in the 1950s and who criticized Diem for not respecting democracy, freedom of the press, and human rights. Moyar lambastes this “effete corps” of liberals for advocating “western” ideals that really had no place in Asia—a continent that traditionally had relied on
authoritarianism. Moyar praised Diem, and those Americans who supported him, because they better understood the real needs of the Vietnamese to have a strong leader who would not hesitate to crack down on troubling dissenters. In making this argument in 2006, Moyar did not mention Diem’s speech to Congress, nor Diem’s other boasts that he was promoting democracy and human rights. It would thus appear to be Moyar’s implicit argument that Diem was justified in lying to the U.S. Congress about his promoting democracy and human rights when seeking additional U.S. taxpayer dollars, but that it was disgusting and naïve for effete French intellectuals in Saigon cafes to call upon Diem to do exactly what he had promised to his enthusiastic American backers.

140. Herring, America’s Longest War, 83–85; Pentagon Papers House Committee Print, vol. 2, IV.A. 5 tab 2, 32–41.
142. Quoted in Herring, America’s Longest War, 118.
143. Reporting to President Kennedy after a 1961 trip, for example, General Maxwell Taylor and National Security Adviser Walt Rostow offered a pessimistic appraisal of the deteriorating military situation in Vietnam. But rather than recommend the ouster of Diem, they argue instead for a massive increase of American military and financial support. President Kennedy made the decision to ramp up military aid and to raise the American military commander in Vietnam, General Harkins, to the same status as the ambassador. Hence the thrust of American military activities in Vietnam were no longer to be understood formally as being in support of political forces of Diem, but were becoming independent military decisions. These 1961 actions that increased aid and altered the command structure “marked a giant step toward America’s assumption of responsibility for the war, a step symbolized by the creation of a formal military command.” American military support for Vietnam doubled between 1961 and 1962, and the military began using defoliants to destroy the vegetation under which NLF fighters ostensibly hid. The number of military “advisers” tripled from approximately 3,000 at the beginning of 1961 to 9,000 by year’s end. In addition, President Kennedy had secretly authorized additional financial support to Vietnam as well as sending clandestine teams of Vietnamese troops to cross the border and conduct raids in North Vietnam. When President Kennedy’s flat denials that Americans were engaging in combat in Vietnam was shown to be false, the U.S. government responded not by telling the truth but by clamping down on the press in Vietnam. Though the American people may not have been aware of American military border crossings, the North Vietnamese were. In 1961 and 1962 some Kennedy advisers had strongly recommended, albeit without success, that the president send up to 100,000 combat troops. Diem, like Kennedy, albeit for different reasons, similarly did not want American combat troops on Vietnamese soil. Diem simply wanted the Americans to fund a 100,000-strong South Vietnamese army under the command of Diem. Herring, America’s Longest War, 97, 102, 104, 105, 95.

During this period, Americans and South Vietnamese also deployed napalm, a burning gel that attaches to the skin. General Harkins was a strong advocate of using napalm, as it “really puts the fear of God into the Vietcong. And that’s what counts.” Hilsman, To Move a Nation, 442. One of the Pulitzer Prize-winning photographs from the Vietnam War was taken of a naked nine-year-old girl, Kim Phuc, screaming as she ran away from a napalm attack in her village that had severely and permanently burned her back. President Nixon, incorrectly, suggested that the searing photograph was a fake.

144. Quoted in Herring, America’s Longest War, 111.
145. Professor Mark Moyar defends this apparent inconsistency in governmental behavior at moment that proved to be a crucial event in Vietnamese history by suggesting that even though the law had long been in effect and even though Catholics had waved their flags only a few days earlier, Diem now realized that no one should be permitted to fly their flags. Moyar, Triumph Forsaken, 212, 456. Moyar offers no evidence supporting this interesting insight into Diem’s mind.

Coincidentally, on May 7, in Birmingham, Alabama (the morning of May 8 in Hué), Public Safety Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor made the fateful decision to order fire hoses be turned on black children who were peacefully protesting racial segregation. The photographs of black school children being hurtled by jet-streams from fire hoses are among the most enduring images of the civil rights movement in the United States. Indeed, Bull Connor’s hoses lit a fire under the civil rights movement. In the three months following the Birmingham march of May 7, more than 1,000 marches occurred in over 200 American cities—in which an estimated 40 percent of the entire black population participated. One month later, on June 11, 1963, partially in response to the public outcry against Bull Connor and his tactics, President Kennedy in a nationwide address announced that he would propose a bill to Congress that ultimately became the single most far-reaching legislation of its kind in American history: the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The repressive tactics of Diem and Bull Connor on virtually the same day on opposite sides of the earth galvanized widespread opposition that produced exactly the opposite reaction of what the two men had attempted to accomplish.

147. For Diem’s brother being the effective political boss of the central provinces, see U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (53-2-63), July 10, 1963, 5; Pentagon Papers, 534.
148. Herring, America’s Longest War, 114.
152. Ibid.
154. Ibid.
155. Ibid.
157. Ibid., 364–66.
158. Ibid., 374 n.2.
159. Ibid.
160. Ibid., 381.
161. Ibid.
163. Time, August 9, 1963.
166. Ibid.
167. Ibid.
168. *New York Times*, June 27, 1963. A few days later, in Saigon, several American journalists who would later become quite famous, were covering yet another demonstration of 300 Buddhist monks when state security officials arrived, started shoving them, and smashed their photographic equipment. Among those involved in the incident were Malcolm Browne (who was shortly to win the Pulitzer Prize for his photograph of the death of Quang Duc), Peter Kalischer of CBS News, Peter Arnett, David Halberstam, and Neil Sheehan. Both the journalists and the American embassy protested. The journalists sent a cable directly to President Kennedy. *New York Times*, July 8, 1963.


176. Ibid.


179. *Time*, August 9, 1963. In his oral history interview, William Colby downplayed the venom of Madame Nhu’s comment by suggesting that she was not sufficiently familiar with the English language to understand just how caustic her comment was. http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/oralhistory.hom/Colby/colby-02.pdf, 26. “I think anyone who heard and saw her statement would not imagine that she was unfamiliar with English nor imagine that she intended it to be anything other than a statement of contempt.”


181. Ibid.


183. The October 11 issue of *Life* also would put Mme. Nhu on its cover. Neither her husband nor brother-in-law would be so honored.


190. Ibid.


198. In one of those strange coincidences that would not pass muster with a shrewd editor of a novel, Cabot Lodge, on his flight from San Francisco to Tokyo, sat across the aisle from


203. Ibid. The 14,000 figure was derived from U.S. authorities, and that number was deliberately understated. The correct number was closer to 18–19,000 (including civilians). *FRUS, 1961–1963, vol. III, Vietnam*, 621–22.


206. August 24, 1963. Although the cable does not say it explicitly, it would appear that the believed reasons for putting the onus on the military would be both to distance Nhu from the negative repercussions, but also to weaken the military so that it could not launch a coup.


209. Ibid.

210. Ibid.

211. The *Pentagon Papers*, referring to this period, contrasted the “generally favorable military situation [to the] grave misgivings about the political state of affairs.” *Pentagon Papers House Committee Print*, vol. 3.IV.B 4, 19. During the meeting in Saigon between President Diem and General Taylor, the president asked the general to give him his candid assessment of the situation in Vietnam. In his response, written on October 2, 1963, with the approval of McNamara and Ambassador Lodge, Taylor wrote:

> It was not until the recent political disturbances beginning in May and continuing through August and beyond that I personally had any doubt as to the ultimate success of our campaign against the Viet Cong. Now, as Secretary McNamara has told you, a serious doubt hangs over our hopes for the future. Can we win together in the face of the reaction to the measures taken by your Government against the Buddhists and the students?


212. The debate continues about exactly what the U.S. government did with regard to the coup and whether the Kennedy administration played a role directly (as alleged by Richard Nixon) or indirectly (as many believe) in the actual assassination of Diem and Nhu. While it is beyond the scope of this analysis to answer this question, my own view is that American officials in Vietnam let it be known that the United States would welcome an ouster of Diem and Nhu and would continue to provide aid to a government and military interested in combating communist insurgents. The generals took the clue and overthrew the government. Kennedy had no wish to have Diem killed, and presumably would have given him safe passage and probably asylum in the United States. The evidence is that he genuinely was horrified when he learned of the brothers’ deaths.
Kennedy’s sense of irony was such that one can well imagine him later thinking of the French proverb, “you can’t make an omelet without breaking eggs.”

213. Karnow, *Vietnam*, 310. Though the first official stories were that both men had committed suicide by poisoning—everyone immediately assumed they had been murdered. Photographs of the two men later made it clear that they had been shot. When President Kennedy first heard the news, he rushed out of the room in shock. Among other accounts of the last hours of Diem and Nhu are *FRUS, 1961–1963, vol. IV, Vietnam*, 531–32.


215. Ibid., 168.

216. Ibid., 182.


223. The U.S. military “sprayed more than 100 million pounds of chemicals such as Agent Orange over millions of acres of forests, destroying an estimated one-half of South Vietnam’s timberlands and leaving horrendous human and ecological costs.” Ibid., 183.


226. According to the 2006 edition of the *CIA World Fact Book*, since 2001, “Vietnamese authorities have reaffirmed their commitment to economic liberalization and international integration. They have moved to implement the structural reforms needed to modernize the economy and to produce more competitive, export-driven industries. Vietnam’s membership in the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and entry into force of the U.S.–Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement in December 2001 have led to even more rapid changes in Vietnam’s trade and economic regime.”

### Chapter 9. Conclusion: The Lessons of History

1. George Bush, President Bush Attends National Prayer Breakfast, February 7, 2008. When President Bush evoked this same rough seas metaphor at the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast two months later, when his popularity was reaching new lows, it provoked a more comprehending and appreciative laughter:

   I can’t thank our fellow citizens enough for taking time out of their lives to lift us up for prayer. I have finally begun to understand the story of the calm and the rough seas—laughter—and I believe—I believe in my heart of hearts that it’s because of the prayers of my fellow citizens.

   George Bush, President Bush Attends National Catholic Prayer Breakfast, April 18, 2008.


3. The accuracy and completeness of the story of George Bush’s coming to Christ described in George W. Bush, *A Charge to Keep* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1999), 136, has subsequently been questioned. Billy Graham had no recollection of
the event that was said to have transformed the young Bush’s life and Arthur Blessitt, the street preacher known for carrying a large wooden cross around the world, recounts an earlier albeit less prestigious version of the conversion, http://www.blessitt.com/?q=praying_with_george_w_bush.

11. Sebastien Fath, *Dieu bénisse l’Amérique* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 10–11. Brian C. Anderson of the Manhattan Institute, writing in *Public Interest* (Spring 2004), argued that “Religion is becoming the major fault line in American politics.” He alleged that “secularists” have “all but captured the Democratic Party.”
12. Foreign observers frequently cite comments by Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Franklin Graham, and sometimes even Tim LaHaye for their supposed insights into American foreign policy thinking. Ironically, many in the conservative religious community inside the United States are becoming increasingly vociferous in their assertions that it is they, the Bible-believing Christians in the United States, who are persecuted by secular humanists who are attempting to drive every vestige of religion out of public life.
14. In a poll asking Americans about military bases abroad, 53 percent believe that the number should remain the same and 15 percent believe that more should be built. Only 27 percent believes that the number of bases abroad should be reduced. Chicago Council on Global Affairs, “World Publics Reject US Role as the World Leader, April 17, 2007, 7, http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/CCGA+_ViewsUS_article.pdf.
15. SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, 11 June 2007.
17. *Army New Service*, March 8, 2006 (Harris Poll) and July 1, 2006 (Gallup Poll).
18. The most popular explanation of the abuse seems to have been that they were due to the failings of a few individual soldiers. Among many examples of this, see David B. Rivkin Jr. and Lee A. Casey, “Abuses Are Abuses: The problem at Abu Ghraib was with individuals, not the system,” *National Review Online*, May 12, 2004, http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/rivkin_casey200405120827.asp. Professor Philip Zimbardo’s famous “Stanford prison experiment” would suggest, to the contrary, that abuses in
prisons are almost guaranteed to occur whenever guards are not properly trained and supervised, and when the chain of command is not held accountable for abuses.

32. See Chapter 6 above.

Appendix II. Chronology of 1954 Coup in Guatemala

1. This and several of the following entries can be found in the official CIA history, Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala 1952–1954* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 127–32.
5. See *FRUS, 1952–1954, Guatemala*, 86 esp. n.2. The plan was adopted over the objections of State Department analysts, Ibid., 87, n.3. The articulating the objections was declassified and published in 1983; the fact that the plan actually was adopted over those objections was not declassified until 2003.
13. Ibid., 448.
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