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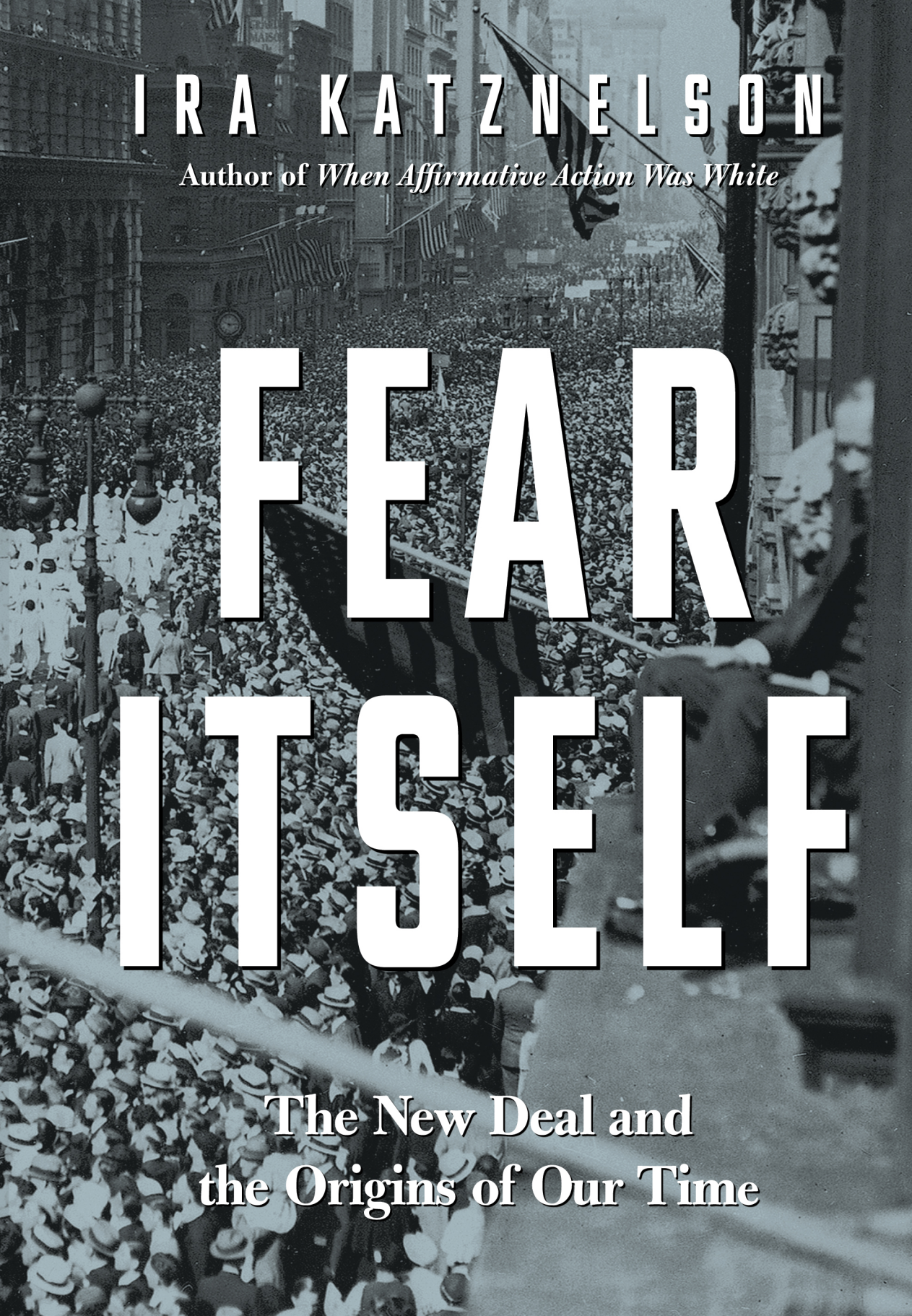
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IRA KATZNELSON

Author of *When Affirmative Action Was White*

FEAR ITSELF

The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time

1

A Journey without Maps

Fear, Michel de Montaigne maintained in the sixteenth century, "exceeds all other disorders in intensity."[1] Likewise, Francis Bacon thought that "nothing is terrible except fear itself"; the statesman and political theorist Edmund Burke observed that "no passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear"; and Henry David Thoreau believed that "nothing is so much to be feared as fear."[2]

Why might this be the case? What distinguishes deep anxieties that generate fear from more ordinary uncertainties and risks? Taking such admonitions and claims seriously during the Roosevelt and Truman years requires identifying the era's objects of fear. The politics and policymaking of the period were not conducted in ordinary circumstances. Spreading like fire from rooftop to rooftop, fear provided a context and served as a motivation for thought and action both for America's leaders and ordinary citizens.

Without grappling adequately with this political and cultural climate, the historical landscape tends to be seen like a series of disconnected but well-mapped roads, each with specific factors said to have caused this or that key outcome. We consider, as examples, how legacies from the past helped cause one landmark law of 1933, the National Industrial Recovery Act, to fail, but another, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, to succeed; we ask whether the 1935 Wagner Act, which established a framework for union development, was the result of labor pressure or business interests; we evaluate the reasons for, and the consequences of, the lapse into deep recession in 1937–1938; and we investigate whether the global preferences of internationally oriented capitalists propelled the foreign and domestic policies of the United States.[3]

The background assumption in such studies is that the politics and policymaking of the period were conducted in customary circumstances of risk. But they were not. Overall, the New Deal had to travel uncharted territory, often without maps in hand.[4] To comprehend its achievements and their price, we must incorporate uncertainty's state of doubt, and identify the objects of fear and the effects of being frightened.[5]

I.

Delivering an address to a Charter Day audience at Berkeley on March 23, 1933, the very day the Reichstag passed its powers to Adolf Hitler and Germany's first concentration camp opened at Dachau,[6] the journalist and political commentator Walter Lippmann sought to understand the time's deep uncertainty. He noted how "the certain landmarks are gone," and how "the fixed points by which our fathers steered the ship of state have vanished." He further identified the rupture between past and present—in the democracies as well as the dictatorships—with two revolutionary developments in modern politics he believed to be "wholly without precedent in history." First was the active and self-conscious participation in government by "the masses of men," making of "modern government in our Western World, even under the dictatorships," something of "a daily plebiscite." The legitimacy of any government thus had come to depend on its ability to solve problems and formulate policies to which the governed would offer consent, both active and passive. Second was the vastly enlarged scope of

governmental action. “Never before has government been on so vast a scale, touching such numbers of men in the vital concerns of their lives. The interests which modern governments are called upon to manage are as novel as they are complicated,” and they now included issues that no nineteenth-century government had faced. These new questions included “relationships between producers and their markets,” “forms of economic organization,” including a place for labor, profound challenges of war and peace in an age of warfare fought by conscript armies and revolutionary violence, and problems of “external and internal political control.”[7] To this list concerning capitalism, workers, military might, and security, he might have added the issue of citizenship, for if politics had become a politics of masses, then defining the qualifications for membership had become ever more pressing. In all, “there is a widespread feeling today among the people” that older codes, conventions, rules, policies, and institutions “lack the power to guide action.”[8]

In accepting the Nobel Prize in Literature a quarter of a century later, Albert Camus summed up the shocking sequence of overlapping developments that his generation had endured during “more than twenty years of an insane history.”

> These men who were born at the beginning of the First World War, who were twenty when Hitler came to power and the first revolutionary trials were beginning, who were then confronted as a completion of their education with the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, the world of concentration camps, a Europe of torture and prisons—these men must today rear their sons and create their works in a world threatened by nuclear destruction.[9]

Not only to Camus but to so many others, as well, this was an age of broken certainties. “When the World War, in which aircraft was employed for the first time on an intensive scale as an instrument of combat broke out, there were few conventional rules and naturally little or no customary law in existence,” a learned commentator wrote in 1924.[10] Across a wide swath of domestic and international issues, policymakers and the public alike had to proceed in similar circumstances. With Western civilization robbed of much of its ethical and political authority, the New Deal confronted novel challenges. The key political question was whether democracies, with their fractious parties, parliaments, and polarization, could invent solutions and find their way while holding on to their core convictions and practices.

Many inside the democracies had serious doubts. Their misgivings grew when economic recovery proved sporadic. Over the course of the 1930s, the globe’s circumstances grew more forbidding. Violence became more common, more intense, more threatening. Security seemed elusive. Commenting in 1936, the English novelist Graham Greene wrote how “our world seems particularly susceptible to brutality.”[11] The constitutional scholar Karl Loewenstein noted in 1937 how dictatorial, antidemocratic regimes possessing seductive emotional power are “no longer an isolated incident in the individual history of a few countries.” Rather, they have “developed into a universal movement which in its seemingly irresistible surge is comparable to the rising of European liberalism against absolutism after the French Revolution.”[12] No one, the U.S. ambassador to Germany, William Dodd, wrote in 1938, “can fail to see increasing evidence that democracy is in grave danger.” Stationed in Berlin from 1933 to 1938, Dodd witnessed the dramatic crumbling of a once-democratic republic. The United States, he warned, “facing the

same dangers ahead," is not exempt.[13] That year, before Nazi armies crossed into Poland to begin the European phase of World War II, the distinguished émigré sociologist Pitirim Sorokin announced that the twentieth century had become "the bloodiest century in the whole history of the Western World."[14] That year as well, George Kennan, then the head of the Russian desk at the Department of State and soon to be the most important architect of the strategy of anti-Soviet containment during the Cold War, started drafting a book recommending that the United States travel "along the road which leads through constitutional change to the authoritarian state," a state he believed would have to be led by a specialized elite who "would have to subject themselves to discipline as they would if they entered a religious order."[15]

What these observers and commentators shared was an understanding that theirs was a time when uncommon uncertainty at a depth that generates fear had overtaken the degree of common risk that cannot be avoided. Any circumstance of contingency is marked by risk of the usual kind. Choices are made based on past experience. Because the properties of most things remain fairly constant, and because the relationship between cause and effect is mostly predictable, it is possible to assess probabilities intelligently. When firms invest, when parents decide which school to select for their children, when individuals buy a house, or when political leaders bargain, vote, and make laws, most of the time the distribution of likely results from particular actions can be calculated, either intuitively or on the basis of statistical analysis. This is the basis for most strategic calculations and rational estimates based on a reasonable degree of confidence.

But when deep uncertainty looms, the ability to choose is transformed. The University of Chicago economist Frank Knight identified such circumstances of "unmeasurable uncertainty" as those that are uncommonly unsure because any valid basis for classifying instances is absent. Effects and outcomes of action cannot be calculated because such situations are unlike any other. In commonplace risk he wrote, "the distribution in a group of instances is known . . . while in the case of uncertainty this is not true, the reason being in general that it is impossible to form a group of instances, because the situation dealt with is in a high degree unique." The novelty and depth of this kind of uncertainty is radical. It is the kind of risk that cannot be ensured against, for the very premises underlying prediction are undermined. Looking ahead, estimates of possibilities and effects grow increasingly opaque. Modeling the future becomes ever more elusive.[16]

Measurable risk generates worry. Unmeasurable risk about the duration and magnitude of uncertainty spawns fear. A large and growing literature in social psychology has examined the question of how persons deal with such realities in thought, feeling, and behavior by attempting to reorganize situations in order to restore consistency and predictability. Under conditions of fear, these various theories and studies about the management of uncertainty reveal that people develop a heightened mindfulness and self-awareness about the constraints on free action, and take, as a central goal, the desire to restore a higher degree of coherence and certainty; that is, they try to reduce deep uncertainty to ordinary risk.[17]

This is how I have come to understand the New Deal. Over the course of its two decades, the reality of deep uncertainty progressively extended the sense that the United States confronted unparalleled dangers. Faced with economic collapse, total war, genocide, atomic weapons, and postwar struggles with Communism, political leaders sought to find means to restore a sense of normal risk. Because they possessed no fixed or sure policy approaches or remedies for the domestic and global crises of the day, they could consider a very wide repertoire of policies. The collective result of the various choices and selections they made to reduce uncertainty to risk,

particularly in Congress, where southern members played a disproportionate role, became, in effect, a new national state, a state with a procedural and a crusading face.

II.

Curiously, though, a time when the presence of fear was pervasive is not how the New Deal era is ordinarily portrayed. A fit of amnesia distorts the era, thus risking an excessively sentimental and simple set of understandings. This tendency appeared from the beginning. Within a week of Franklin Roosevelt's inauguration, Walter Lippmann, who only weeks earlier had spoken of the uncertainty of the times, celebrated how "the manner in which the Administration has conducted itself fully justifies the public approval which is manifest everywhere. It has proceeded rapidly, surely, and boldly, dealing directly with the essentials, accepting responsibility without hesitation, relying confidently upon the willingness of the people to face realities." Heralding a redemptive theme that later organized the narrative of most New Deal histories, Lippmann rejoiced in how "the nation, which had lost confidence in everything and everybody, has regained confidence in the government and in itself."[18] It was as if he had worried too much at Berkeley; yet he had not.

The president's own inaugural rhetoric, announcing that fear itself was unjustified, had the virtue of avoiding fearmongering, of not promoting hysteria, and thus not worsening the quality of democratic thought and deliberation. Unlike some appeals to fear, it was not a free-floating invocation of insecurity, without content, the all-too-familiar kind that can open the door to demagoguery, manipulation, and control.[19] Insisting that "we are stricken by no plague of locusts," but by a crisis caused by speculative greed and misguided policy decisions, Roosevelt called for "an end to a conduct in banking and in business which too often has given to a sacred trust the likeness of callous and selfish wrongdoing," and he identified "safeguards against a return of the evils of the old order; there must be a strict supervision of all banking and credits and investments; there must be an end to speculation with other people's money, and there must be provision for an adequate but sound currency."

By presenting a sober and realistic account of danger without crossing the line into apprehension so acute as to be paralyzing, FDR offered reassurance. His political narrative featured how public policy could overcome fear. This was how his formulation about fear itself was intended, and this, as it turned out, was how he later would represent his administration's achievements. Accepting his party's nomination for a second term in June 1936, Roosevelt laid claim to having vanquished fear itself. "In those days, we feared fear. That was why we fought fear. And today, my friends, we have won against the most dangerous of our foes—we have conquered fear," he stated, patently ignoring the developing maelstrom that was laying siege to the European and Asian continents.[20]

Moving from deep trouble to a positive resolution, this appealing rendering soon became the norm for historians, journalists, and social scientists. It successfully organized many strands into a coherent story. But this came at a high price, bypassing, as the literary critic Alfred Kazin remarked, "the permanent crisis that is the truth of our times," thus letting pass "the truth that cannot be fitted in, the jagged edges that would detract from the straight frame and the smooth design."[21]

Among historians, this theme of rescue and salvation was first projected by Arthur Meier

Schlesinger in *The New Deal in Action, 1933–1937,* the earliest serious assessment by a member of his profession and one that set the main contours for later scholarship.[22] In just thirty-six printed pages, he represented the New Deal as a successful response to economic catastrophe and political crisis. This text famously distinguished the First New Deal's measures of relief and recovery to prevent starvation, ameliorate suffering, and jolt the capitalist economy from the Second New Deal's long-term measures of economic regulation and social policy, including the 1934 Securities Exchange Act and the 1935 Social Security Act. By radically transforming the range and scale of the national state, by curbing and controlling market excesses, and by adding social rights to citizenship, the New Deal, he argued, had restored trust and loyalty, hopefulness and popular support.

Like Schlesinger, the great majority of historians have underscored these achievements, stressing how they redrew the country's lines of civil society and the geometry of political pressure, and how, in just over half a decade, President Roosevelt's program transformed not only the range and scale of government but also the character of the country's economy and the scope of American citizenship. It is impossible to write about this subject without attending to these matters. This book is no exception. From the inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt to the 1939 outbreak of World War II in Europe, the New Deal substantially increased the domestic scope of government. A federal civil service that had 572,000 employees grew to one of 920,000 in just those six years, and spending nearly doubled, going from $4.6 billion to $8.8 billion, as a host of alphabet agencies and programs—AAA, CWA, PWA, REA, TVA, WPA, NRA, SEC, NLRB, FLSA, FHA, FSA, and more—undertook unprecedented responsibility for public employment and public works, relief payments, labor policy, and the regulation of capitalism.[23] "More than anything else," Hubert Humphrey recalled in 1970, "the New Deal was a change in the scope of public responsibility."[24]

After World War I, the liberal intellectual Harold Stearns had reflected on the lessons conveyed by that war's massive bloodletting, enhanced state power, reduction to the scope of freedom, and jingoistic hysteria. He perceptively predicted an uncertain future for the liberal democratic political tradition in the West. He thought such governments could not survive as effective actors unless they could devise social revolutions without violence to carve out a space for reason in the face of the intensifying conflict between labor and capital, and the virulent nationalism characterizing relations among countries.[25] The familiar story of the New Deal as a movement from fear to expectation, brought about by retrofitting capitalism and shaping a welfare state, appropriately focuses on how the New Deal achieved what Stearns meant by a social revolution without violence. It captures, as the historian Richard Hofstadter put it, how the remarkable combination of Roosevelt's "opportunistic virtuosity" and his administration's policy improvisations, "in their totality, carried the politics and administration of the United States farther from the conditions of 1914 than those had been from the conditions of 1880."[26] But it misses both the perception and the reality of persistent fear.[27]

To be sure, despondency and insecurity at the New Deal's founding has long been a familiar theme. The stock market crash and capitalism's global crisis starkly posed the question whether prosperity and liberty could be renewed simultaneously under democratic auspices. "The Politics of Hard Times" and "Winter of Despair" open William Leuchtenburg's classic *Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal.*[28] Following in his father's footsteps, the no less venerable Arthur Schlesinger Jr. defined the subject of his evocative trilogy, *The Age of Roosevelt,* as "The Crisis

of the Old Order."[29] He recalled how, from 1929 to 1932, farm income had dropped by 70 percent, automobile production by 65 percent, and the value of the stock market by over 80 percent. Industrial production dropped precipitously. Thirteen million Americans had lost their jobs. Before the crash in October and November 1929, some 3 percent of Americans had been out of work. The proportion of unemployed thereafter had reached a calamitous 24 percent, and those lucky enough to keep their jobs often had their pay cut.[30] Farmers who could not keep up with their mortgage payments lost their land; many homeowners, a minority at the time, lost their homes; and tenants who could not pay their rent lost their dwellings. More broadly, the system of credit and banking had broken down, posing a major threat to the continuation of market capitalism. With factories "ghostly and silent, like extinct volcanoes," families sleeping "in tarpaper shacks and tin-lined caves," and "thousands of vagabond children . . . roaming the land," Schlesinger wrote, the country faced a "mood of helplessness." A "contagion of fear" and "a fog of despair hung over the land."[31]

But in these, and in a great many other, estimable histories, fear and uncertainty drop out too soon.[32] Stirred perhaps by President Roosevelt's "firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself," the New Deal is presented as a story of how assertive economic policies overcame doubt and restored confidence during President Roosevelt's first term.[33] Measuring where things stood late in 1936, Schlesinger applauded how "the fog began to lift." The president, he wrote, "was apparently succeeding; and people could start to believe again in the free state and its capacity to solve problems of economic instability and social injustice. Free society, in consequence, might not yet be finished; it had a future; it might have the strength and steadfastness to surmount the totalitarian challenge."[34] With successful legislative and policy achievements, Franklin Roosevelt's initial term had transformed the politics of upheaval into a politics of hope.[35]

III.

In fact, the entire New Deal period, lasting until the inauguration of Dwight Eisenhower in 1953, reflects an unremitting sense of fragility. From the Great Depression to the blood-filled battlefields in Korea, persistent, nearly unremitting anxiety conditioned the era's "normal politics" of voting, public opinion, pressure groups, federalism, and the separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. Faced with desolation, the New Deal proceeded in an anguish-filled environment. In such a world, the most constant features of American political life continually threatened to become unstable, if not unhinged. The ability of leaders to cope with menacing economic, ideological, and military threats never could seem quite sure.

It must be underscored that fear was not banished after just four years of the New Deal. To the contrary, it only deepened. Schlesinger's temporal limits, substantive foci, and vivid theatrical structure in *The Age of Roosevelt* understate the sheer range of tests American democracy faced as it lacked assured policies to rescue capitalism, confront the dictatorships, and deal with global power and conflict. The presentation of the era's challenges to liberal democracy as primarily those of American economic suffering had also been too limited. The Depression deepened and spread virally across the globe, sparing virtually no place and no economic sector. Collapsing production and consumption, shrinking markets, diminishing trade, the loss of credit and liquidity,

and especially a sweeping increase in unemployment were not countered by effective remedies anywhere for something like half a decade. First responses, including high tariffs and stringent austerity policies, only made things worse. Among all social classes and groups, confidence about capitalism plummeted, and the prestige of private business fell off radically. The World Economic Conference of 1933 failed. Even when economic recovery began, it proved fitful, remaining well below late 1920s levels for most of the 1930s.

The global crisis to which the New Deal had to respond, moreover, transcended economic duress. During the period covered by *The Age of Roosevelt,* international and multilateral institutions to keep the peace and prevent a return to the carnage of World War I, most notably the League of Nations and the Kellogg-Briand Pact, began to collapse in the face of imperial Japan's conquest of Manchuria and its attack on Shanghai.[36] The range of political repression also broadened. The Soviet Gulag as a branch of State Security was officially born in 1930 to manage camp complexes, most in Siberia, that ultimately housed millions. Many were mobilized for immense projects of rapid industrialization, including the White Sea Canal. A growing network of German concentration camps imprisoned people for who they were and what they believed rather than for how they had acted, thus housing "a particular type of noncriminal, civilian prisoner, the members of an 'enemy' group, or at any rate a category of people who, for reasons of their race or presumed politics, are judged to be dangerous or extraneous to society."[37] Though the majority of Americans were not yet alert to the severity and consequences of these distant developments, the country's leaders were keenly aware that threats to liberal democracy were proliferating in a way that was without precedent.

The pressures on liberal democracy did not stop in the second half of FDR's first term. At home, the economic recovery left many millions in dire circumstances. An environmental crisis ravaged agriculture.[38] Racial violence erupted. Anti-Semitism reared its head. Labor unrest grew. Demagogues talked louder.[39] Of course it would be an exaggeration to state that the United States was on the verge of joining the democratic collapse that was spreading like a domino effect during the 1930s. But there were plenty of dangers at home and a continuing atrophy for liberal democracy abroad.

The United States possessed many of the same features that Hannah Arendt was soon to associate with the rise of totalitarianism. These included racism as a robust ideology, imperial expansion, and the control of subject populations. Proud of their diaspora nationalism, there was much ethnic admiration, even loyalty, to German and Italian Fascism, ideological attachment to the USSR to the point of spying, and there was a good deal of anti–civil liberties counterpunching by Congress, the courts, and the executive branch. American democracy may not have risked the same apocalyptic fate as the Weimar Republic. Nevertheless, there was a real set of pitfalls. At issue were prospects of executive usurpation and excessive congressional delegation, the projection of antidemocratic (and racist) mass populism and instances of private violence against targeted groups, an increase in surveillance and pressures on civil liberties, suspensions of due process, and, most broadly, a loss of democratic legitimacy.

The period's various forms of political tyranny—including Fascism, Nazism, Stalinist Bolshevism, Peronist populism, and Japanese militarism—grew in number and became more confident and overbearing. Over the course of the decade, these various regimes that sought to move "forward from liberalism"[40] claimed to make constitutional democracy obsolete, a mere stage of history. Emerging like an irresistible tide and professing to be riding the wave of the

future, these various governments legitimated torture, police terror, and show trials. They also concentrated power, extinguishing all but the ruling party. They geared "the whole of society and the private life of the citizen to the system of political domination."[41] By late 1938, "only Britain, France, the Low Countries, and Scandinavia" had experienced success "in any sense preserving those 'liberal' freedoms which had spread across Europe since 1789."[42] "The outstanding feature of our time is insecurity," England's leading political analyst, Harold Laski, declared in 1939. "The liberal society of the epoch before 1914 is unthinkable in our age."[43]

The scope of sources generating fear continued to grow. In the two years before the outbreak of World War II in Europe, Nazi Germany "had regained a dominance in Europe at least comparable to that of Bismarck; and like that of Bismarck, it was exercised with the willing consent of the British government and the glum acquiescence of the French."[44] With American neutrality, the relative absence of opposition to Hitler's hegemony, near silence about Nazism's fierce discrimination and humiliation of German Jews, and widespread democratic exhaustion and indifference, the surviving democracies seemed limp and incapable. Even more seemed lost in the demoralizing dislocations at the start of the 1940s. Poland, France, and a host of other countries were seized by the Nazis. Collaboration, whether official, as with France's Vichy government, or quotidian, was far more common than resistance. The stream of refugees became a torrent on a biblical scale.[45] The sudden fall of France in June 1940 was especially shocking. Late that month, the president of the Swiss Confederation, Marcel Pilet-Golaz, addressed the country by radio. He counseled that "this is not the time to look with melancholy toward the past," explaining why the country's legislative procedures would be suspended. "The government has to act. Conscious of its responsibilities, the executive branch will fully assume them. Outside and above party lines, the Federal Council will serve all Swiss. . . . Confederates, you will have to follow the Federal Council as a devoted and steady guide. We will not always have the opportunity to explain, comment, and justify our decisions. Events are happening fast; we have to adapt to their pace."[46] The morale of the other democracies was also shaken.

Wartime violence placed civilians at a risk higher than they had faced during World War I. Then, as with prior wars, if on a much more intense scale of killing, "the armies destroyed everything in their path, but the path was narrow, and towns a little way out of the path were hardly affected."[47] The road of devastation was not nearly as narrow the second time around. Rotterdam was entirely razed from the air in May 1940. German bombers conducted raids across the Channel, hitting Sheffield, Birmingham, Hull, Plymouth, Glasgow, Coventry (smashing its cathedral and putting one-third of its homes in ruin), and London, damaging the Tower and Westminster Abbey, demolishing the northern wing of Parliament, and devastating much of the East End—at a cost of 30,000 lives and 100,000 homes. "Entire chunks of the city centre, including the busy shopping and office area between St Mary-le-Bow and St Paul's Cathedral, returned to the primal state of the old London, a wilderness of mud, rubble, and tall grass, a plain where only a few footpaths bore the names of former streets," anticipating by three decades the apocalyptic scenery imagined by J. G. Ballard.[48] Despite its ill-fated August 1939 Non-Aggression Pact with Germany, the Soviet Union was being pummeled even more spectacularly. Hitler's exterminationist empire was confidently on the march.[49] In what Timothy Snyder has called the "forgotten Holocaust,"[50] SS Einsatzgruppen murdered tens of thousands each day in Belarus and Ukraine; in July 1941, orders were given to shoot all the Jews of Minsk; in just two days, September 29 and 30, 33,771 Jews who had been rounded up at Kiev were executed, naked

and their faces to the ground, in an immense ravine at Babi Yar. More Jews were put to death behind the front that year than Soviet troops killed by German soldiers in battle.[51] Japanese militarism controlled much of the Pacific and the Asian mainland, having conquered the Philippines, Burma, Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies. Australia was threatened by invasion.[52] China seemed quite likely to yield to Japanese force. America faced an uncertain two-front war that was exacting high casualties. "Nationalism, capitalism, liberalism are in the crucible; it may take years," the lawyer and sociologist David Riesman declared in 1942, "before a new amalgam of social forces emerges which can give promise of some stability and peace."[53]

Even before the Cold War rent the alliance between the Soviet Union and the Allied powers, scorning postwar hopes for a United Nations that would mean more than a new global institution, World War II had proved to be "a tainted triumph."[54] The United States fought with a segregated army. Xenophobia and racism helped frame the campaign against Japan; "Admiral Ernest King, Chief of Naval Operations, wrote to President Roosevelt in March 1942 that the USA could not permit the 'white man's countries' of Australia and New Zealand to be conquered by Japan 'because of the repercussions among the non-white races of the world.'"[55] Terrible destruction had been wrought by incendiary carpet bombing, then by atomic weapons.[56] City after city, by war's end, not just in Europe but also in Asia, lay in ruins.[57] And even before the inevitable diffusion of the relevant knowledge and capacity, the very existence of the first nuclear bombs utterly transformed the human condition. The rain of actual and potential destruction had grown more intense, more widespread, far more promiscuous. And there was no turning back.

Above all, the victory of 1945 was tarnished by the discovery of the Holocaust, an orgy of organized slaughter that exceeded earlier twentieth-century instances, including the attempt, between 1904 and 1907, to exterminate the Herero and Namaqua peoples of German Southwest Africa by driving them into the Omaheke desert and poisoning their wells after their insurgency against colonial rule, or the Ottoman Empire's mass killing and starvation of Armenians during World War I. This shocking enlargement of genocide had been accompanied mainly by passivity or complicity.[58] After the war, a swollen mass of forced emigrants and displaced persons again filled the roads. "It was estimated that by May 1945 there were perhaps 40.5 million uprooted people in Europe, excluding non-German forced labourers and Germans who fled before the advancing Soviet armies."[59] Writing about the death camps, the Holocaust survivor Paul Celan described it as a time of "black milk" in his poem "Todesfuge."[60]

Even after the fighting stopped, there was no escape from its unprecedented compound of violence, willful mass murder, ideological fervor, and radical versions of state and party. The war, moreover, left the United States deeply unsure about how to deal with Stalin's Soviet Union. "At best optimistic and at worst naïve," the historian John Morton Blum judged, American policymakers had "projected their own understanding of American politics beyond the borders of its relevance," and thus found themselves, both in East Europe and in Asia, caught between an unwillingness to impose liberal democracy by brute force, especially in a confrontation with the Soviet Union at war's end, and an acceptance of a division of the world by realist, great power, principles, and thus the acceptance of the actuality of Communist global power.[61]

"The war changed everything," Tony Judt observed, making key features of the past "unrecoverable."[62] Moreover, fear did not dissipate once the fighting stopped. It became pervasive, persistently constitutive, both deeply particular and broadly abstract. With unlimited

power having joined unlimited violence, and with killing, married to passionate causes, having gone beyond any reasonable assessment of instrumental utility, even what had remained of conventional standards after World War I eroded. Only with the depredations of World War II was it absolutely clear, as Leszek Kolakowski has put the point, that "evil is not contingent. It is not the absence of deformation, or subversion of virtue . . . but a stubborn and unredeemable fact."[63] Only then did all humankind, even its most advantaged, fall within the ambit of a permanent fear.

IV.

Even in the mid-1930s, when the New Deal's domestic achievements seemed most apparent, many contemporaries were not convinced that fear had been conquered. Howard Odum, for example, a sober southern moderate who was a leading student of the demography, culture, and economy of his region, strongly supported President Roosevelt's initiatives. Odum warned in 1935 (the year the Wagner Act, chartering unions, and the Social Security Act passed into law) that American democracy was at risk from the country's "multiplied inequalities of opportunity for the majority of the people." He noted the "increasing injustice throughout the Nation," "a well-nigh universal lack of security," and "widespread confusion, unrest, distrust, and despair." Describing "a mixed picture," he took note of American "movements toward violent revolution," "the movement toward fascism and dictatorship," and various messianic currents and regional discontents. Despite the apparent solidity of the two-party system and constitutional arrangements, a strong possibility existed, he believed, for "anything but orderly transitional democracy," especially in the South. Calling for unprecedented national planning, he concluded "in simple language . . . that there will be no democracy or formal alternative to democracy in the United States for the next period, say twelve years." Rather, he predicted that the nation would experience a deeply uncertain "struggle to evolve an orderly democracy . . . in competition with the other alternatives of chaos, revolution, super-corporate control and centralization, socialism, communism, and fascism."[64]

Of course, no single essay can accurately reflect the ethos of an era. But even if judged to be an overstatement of actual danger for American democracy, Odum's words of warning in fact were characteristic. They were echoed many times over. Explaining in *I'm for Roosevelt* why he supported the president, Joseph P. Kennedy, then the first chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission (and the father of the nineteen-year-old John Fitzgerald, the eleven-year-old Robert Francis, and the four-year-old Edward Moore), commented in 1936 that "democracy will not be safe for this country unless we constructively deal with causes of dictatorships. . . . If our democracy is to survive the attacks of dictatorship, whether open or veiled, we must solve the problem of security."[65] In an election-eve radio address in November 1938, even President Roosevelt mused aloud about the safety of the American political system when "in other lands across the water the flares of militarism and conquest, terrorism and intolerance" had grown. "Comparisons in this world are unavoidable," he noted, arguing that "in these tense and dangerous situations in the world, democracy will save itself with the average man and woman by proving itself worth saving." He then ventured "the challenging statement that if American democracy ceases to move forward as a living force, seeking day and night by peaceful means to better the lot of our citizens, then Fascism and Communism . . . will grow in strength in our

land."[66]

By the late 1930s, Walter Lippmann had become a sharp critic of the New Deal. Referring to Woodrow Wilson's unredeemed promise of global peace, the Republican party's ill-fated guarantee of permanent prosperity in the 1920s, and what he thought to be the New Deal's still-unrealized pledge to end the economic devastation of the Great Depression, Lippmann wrote of how mass disaffection after the deep recession of 1937–1938 had caused popular hopes that the economy was recovering to recede. He attributed America's vulnerability to the power and lure of the globe's dictatorships in 1939 to "the accumulated disappointments of the post-War era," reminding his readers that "three times in these twenty years the American people have had great hope and three times they have been greatly disappointed."[67] The idea of hope restored rang hollow.

The next year, Lewis Mumford, one of the country's most prominent intellectuals, was troubled by "the disintegration of liberalism." Notwithstanding the enactment of all the major New Deal legislative achievements, he cautioned:

> . . . the philosophy of liberalism has been dissolving before our eyes during the last decade: too noble to surrender, too sick to fight. The liberal has begun to lack confidence in himself and in the validity of his ideals. . . . Unable to take measure of our present catastrophe, and unable because of their inner doubts and contradictions and subtleties to make effective decisions, liberals have lost most of their essential convictions: for ideals remain real only when one continues to realize them. . . . If we are to save the human core of liberalism—and it is one of the most precious parts of the entire human heritage—we must slough off the morbid growths that now surround it.[68]

The scope of the era's fearful concern for democracy soon widened. In 1941, the University of Chicago political scientist Harold Lasswell identified the "garrison state" as a new form of rule, presided over by specialists in violence, that cut across the distinction between democracies and dictatorships. The maturation of total war as a concept after World War I, he feared, had utterly transformed not just the technology of warfare and the mobilization of production and propaganda. It had also altered the very character of modern states, including the United States. "With the socialization of danger as a permanent characteristic of modern violence the nation becomes one unified technical enterprise." In such circumstances, he asked in anguish, "what democratic values can be preserved, and how?"[69]

Lasswell's University of Chicago colleague, the prominent sociologist David Riesman, took up this theme a year later. Considering "civil liberties in a period of transition," he showed how the traditional distinction between normal and special times had become obsolete. "It is unrealistic," he cautioned, "to rely on sharp distinctions between war and peace to test the limits of civil liberty," for "today, it is 'peace' which is anomalous, not war." He predicted "that after this war (which may last for many years), it is most unlikely that we can, or even if we can we will want to, return to 'normalcy.'" Liberal democracy, he argued, must be rethought in this context of permanent uncertainty and civic mobilization in order to discover how, by way of "affirmative governmental action . . . an aggressive public policy might substitute new liberties for the vanishing liberty of atomistic individuals." Haunted by the collapse of Germany's Weimar Republic, he concluded with a charged warning about Fascism in America: "Like a flood, it

begins in general erosions of traditional beliefs, in the ideological dust storms of long ago, in little rivulets of lies, not caught by authorized channels."[70]

Much as Riesman projected, deep uncertainty about the character and prospects of liberal democracy lingered after World War II had been won. The eminent philosopher Morris Raphael Cohen closed his 1946 collection of essays expressing "the faith of a liberal" by underscoring the doctrine's vulnerability in an inhospitable world: "We are now entering into the world arena, and the question is no longer that of the special type of liberal civilization which once existed in the United States, but whether any type of liberal civilization can exist in America."[71]

John F. Kennedy responded to a Harvard University class questionnaire that year by noting, "I am pessimistic about the future of the country." Half of the fifteen thousand business executives polled by *Fortune* projected an "extended major depression with large-scale unemployment in the next ten years."[72] Reflecting on the West's cultural and political crisis, the economic sociologist Paul Meadows cautioned that "the close of the recent war can hardly change the fact that the ideological revolutions in Europe during the 'twenties and 'thirties bludgeoned liberals into a reeling retreat," and that unless the liberal political tradition learned to live in a world of power, it would continue to surrender to this retreat.[73] This moment of despondency soon was followed by the Maoist victory in China, the fright of nuclear proliferation, intensified conflicts about race and civil liberty, and a bloody war in Korea, claiming some three million lives, overwhelmingly civilian, that was marked by gross miscalculations of Chinese intentions and fighting ability, a disastrous retreat, a counterattack restoring the thirty-eight parallel as the dividing line between the North and South, and a showdown between Gen. Douglas MacArthur and President Truman, in which the president repulsed a stark challenge to the civilian control of the military.[74]

During the era's last phase—marked by the Cold War, Stalinist and anti-Communist fanaticism, atomic fear, and a new hot war in Asia—many learned observers worried whether liberal democracy could maintain its balance and élan. With Roosevelt gone, Richard Hofstadter was quite unsure. He concluded a 1948 assessment by writing:

> [FDR] is bound to be the dominant figure in the mythology of any resurgent American liberalism. There are ample texts in his writing for men of good will to feed upon; but it would be fatal to rest content with his belief in personal benevolence, personal arrangements, the self-sufficiency of good intentions, and month-to-month improvisation, without trying to achieve a more inclusive and systematic conception of what is happening in the world.[75]

Permanent violence and permanent insecurity loomed. "Our own outlook, as well as the world's outlook," Columbia University's Asia specialist Nathaniel Peffer asserted in 1948, "is darker than before 1914 or even 1939. . . . We have not even the assurance of a transient peace, to say nothing of a long truce, as after Waterloo and the Congress of Vienna. On all the evidence before us, we are now in the state of prelude to war." At a moment marked by ever "sharper fears," the "pendant issue" is that of "absolutism versus democracy, or, better put, representative government," with "democracy losing by default," judging that its "lease on life is precarious again, perhaps more so than before the war. Again it appears to be in danger of being ground between Right and Left."[76] Looking inward in this situation, the poet Archibald MacLeish

cautioned a Pomona College graduating class in 1950 that the country found itself in a "trap of fear and hate."[77]

Surrounded by wild and intense insecurity, American political institutions and processes could not look to fixed points or a guiding status quo. As the novelist Robert Musil once described turn-of-the-century Austria, no one "could quite distinguish what was above and what was below, between what was moving forward and backward."[78] Decision making had to proceed under conditions that made it uncommonly difficult to assign probabilities to what might lie ahead based on past experience.

Intense uncertainty, the kind that makes the usual sense of the term *status quo* virtually irrelevant, became a source of fear. No one quite knew whether the era's constellation of crises indicated "a state of greater or lesser permanence, as in a longer or shorter transition towards something better or worse or towards something altogether different."[79] The federal government proceeded in circumstances of recurring and escalating emergency without the benefit of an established starting point and without a fixed repertoire of public policies that were effective and legitimate. As Presidents Roosevelt and Truman sought to reduce such deep uncertainty to a more tolerable level of risk, they lacked fixed or sure preferences about public policy. As a result, the field of policy invention was uncommonly open but also largely uncharted. Unusually unconstrained by existing public policy, the New Deal possessed a wider array of policy possibilities than any prior set of government initiatives in American history. It could learn from a store of initiatives tested both by liberal democracies and by illiberal dictatorships in Europe. It could emulate experiments the various states had initiated, and adapt policies developed under different conditions by progressives in both major parties, by democratic socialists, by the labor movement, and even by mainstream Republicans in the Hoover administration. It could draw on a wide array of options developed by policy intellectuals who worked in university social science departments, law schools, and recently established think tanks, and who sought to invent alternatives in the space that lay between an insufficient status quo and the designs offered by the era's dictatorships. But could it succeed despite the self-seeking partisanship of politicians and the polarization inherent in the legislative process?

V.

Not surprisingly, America's émigré intellectuals who had come close to the abyss acutely comprehended the stakes. Imbued with concerns about "the evil of politics and the ethics of evil,"[80] they were particularly attuned to liberal democracy's difficult, intransigent, and unresolved dilemmas.[81] They possessed a discriminating sense of the insufficiency of older models of liberal democracy, combined with a keen alertness about the present. Like Henry James in Venice, they often thought of themselves as brooding tourists, brooding because they understood that the time was marked by many unimaginably bad choices.

During the academic year 1935–1936, the small but remarkable group of refugee scholars who constituted the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research in New York assembled in regular sessions of what they called their "General Seminar" to assess the prospects for political economic democracy on the understanding, as the institution's president, Alvin Johnson, put the point, that "democracy is the central problem of all present day serious political thinking."[82] This was a regular gathering of members of the primarily German and Jewish cohort

of social scientists who had escaped Fascism. Their lives had ruptured. Their commitment to democracy was marked less by an ameliorative instinct—though they did have strong views about how to make liberal democracy and modern capitalism work better—than by resistance to all forms of dictatorship. From the perspective of these newcomers, the faith of American liberals—the very idea that fear had been supplanted by hope—seemed too simple, rather credulous, even provincial.

The issues they took up in their General Seminar concerned the roots of Fascism, the vulnerability and excesses of democracy, the era's sources of mass irrationality, and deformations in public opinion. In doing so, they compelled attention to what, arguably, were the most vital challenges of their time, defending liberal democracy in an open, rich, and cosmopolitan way. Reports of their meetings record how they grappled with the strengths and weaknesses of parliamentary representation, the role of political parties, and the rule of law in circumstances where "everyone today pictures democracy and parliamentary institutions on the defensive or already definitely in retreat. . . . Thus it is a crucial question for the future," Hans Simons wrote, "whether democracy and parliamentarism can gain in strength and influence not only in comparison with dictatorship, but in their intrinsic value and in their capacity for expansion."[83] Also striking is how these intellectuals linked those broad and fundamental concerns about democracy to specific policy discussions about economic planning, trade unions and the regulation of labor conflicts, taxation and the distribution of wealth, and foreign policy, on the understanding that whether liberal democracy could thrive depended considerably on what kind of liberal democracy might be fashioned in hard times.[84] All this was occurring at the very moment when fear was said to have been vanquished.

Two years after these intellectuals met, Thomas Mann crossed the United States from February to May 1938 to lecture to audiences totaling some sixty thousand in order to help marshal "the coming victory of democracy." Mann spoke of a "lust for human degradation which it would be too much honour to call devilish." Worried that "democracy as a whole is still far from acquiring a clear conception of this fascist concentration, of the fanaticism and absolutism of the totalitarian state," he stressed that "democracy and fascism live, so to speak, on different planets." He reminded his listeners that, as a degenerated regime, a travesty of democracy, "it is in physical and mental oppression that fascism believes. . . . Oppression is not only the ultimate goal, but the first principle of fascism." Such dictatorships, "hostile to freedom," mobilize nationalism as "a thoroughly aggressive impulse, directed against the outer world; its concern is not with conscience, but with power; not with human achievement, but with war." With the Final Solution still some years off, he also brought to light "the treatment of the Jews in Germany, the concentration camps and the things which took place and are still taking place in them," including the "ignominious distinctions such as the cutting of the hair and the yellow spot."[85]

These brooding immigrants, together with other newcomers, whose numbers included Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, Leo Strauss, Franz Neumann, and Hans Morgenthau, had no illusions about the era's depths of despair, the constitutive features of fear, or the fragility of liberal democracy.[86] "Exiled in paradise," they composed a particularly attentive group that watched and evaluated how the New Deal took up custody for liberal democracy. Perhaps more attentively than other Americans, they painfully observed how, in pursuing liberal guardianship, Washington risked—indeed, had to risk—informal cooperation and formal alliances with illiberal partners, and they acutely noticed when the federal government pushed constitutional

processes right to the limit of rights and liberties, sometimes beyond.[87] More than most, they also comprehended that the global contest with the dictatorships of the Right and the Left was a struggle about the persistence and competence of representative parliamentary government in a situation of deep uncertainty. With more reason than most to be unsure of the ultimate outcome, they never underestimated either the achievement or its costs. "Something new, a new world began," Stefan Zweig wrote about transformations to democratic culture and politics in the United States shortly before his suicide in Brazil, in February 1942. "But how many hells, how many purgatories had to be crossed before it could be reached!"[88]

VI.

The credibility of the claims made both by the dictatorships and by the democracies depended on the degree to which they could innovate to solve the major problems of the day and thus reduce uncertainty to risk.[89] These were matters both of reality and of its perception. With the development of film and radio, dictators and democratic leaders alike could address their nations directly in regular talks and addresses. To be persuasive, they had to be seen to be inventing genuine answers to pressing questions. The period's contest between the dictatorships and the democracies was a competition to find responses to central dilemmas, and to discover whether parliamentary democracies could do as well as the illiberal regimes in this struggle for supremacy.[90]

The dictatorships projected many alluring answers. With market capitalism performing so poorly, the Italians put forward a corporatist model that coordinated matters of labor and capital under the auspices of the state. The Germans advanced a highly managed capitalism. The Soviets, who had eliminated private property and markets altogether, pushed ahead with an ever-more-ambitious planned economy.[91] These economic nostrums had big implications for the character of social class and the role of labor. Italy folded unions into its authoritarian corporatism, making them compliant. Germany eviscerated their independence. The Soviet Union created the form of union representation but without the content, having integrated it into the Communist Party apparatus. Each claimed in its own way to have surmounted class conflict, the bane of market capitalism, while creating a united people, based on solidarities of a singular nation, race, or class, and a commitment to the common welfare of its members. In all, these initiatives seemed to herald the future at a time when the advanced economies of the world seemed to be moving, in one form or another, from competitive to planned economies.[92]

While the United States was struggling with how it might engage with global affairs, the dictatorships projected a sense of assurance and apparent know-how to enhance their might and maintain national security. They promoted a pervasive militarism. For the Italians, the armed forces, especially Italo Balbo's air force, were key symbols of national revival and Fascist modernity. For the Soviets, a decision was taken in 1931 and 1932 to accelerate large-scale military investment, moving from 1.8 billion rubles in 1931 to 4 billion the next year, and fully 14.8 billion by 1936, then accelerating to 40.88 billion in 1939, or approximately 4 billion U.S. dollars. Similarly, Nazi Germany's spending on arms and soldiers spiraled from under 1 billion reichsmarks in 1933 to 10.2 billion in 1936, and 38 billion by 1939, a level approximating 9 billion U.S. dollars.[93] By contrast, the United States, in the grip of isolationist sentiment, spent just $0.6 billion on military defense in 1933, 0.9 in 1936, and 1.3 in 1939.[94] The high level of

spending by the dictatorships was accompanied by a widespread militarization of political and popular life, and the armed forces, following purges in the second half of the 1930s in Germany and the Soviet Union, were tied ever more closely to the ruling parties and to decisions taken directly by Stalin and Hitler. Their regimes, and the Italian, routinely utilized vocabularies charged with violent metaphors that symbolically created united countries ready for war.

The dictatorships introduced advanced models of internal security reflecting strictly defined strong criteria for membership, based on ideology, nation, and race. Their programs of control were not compromised by attention to the liberties of citizens. The Soviet Union, which described itself as a union of peoples, imposed class criteria for full citizenship, downplaying nationalism, while in Germany a racially defined conception of nation—the nation as *Volk*—set limits for how Nazism sanctioned citizenship (German Jews could not qualify as ethnic Germans), presenting a model that was copied, if more moderately, by the Italian government in 1938. Each of these countries induced order from the willing and imposed it on those who were not. Each used police powers with hardly any constraints. Each justified its repressive apparatus with Manichean language, sharply distinguishing foes from friends, the certainty of these divisions intrinsically appealing in such dark times. Germany and the USSR established immensely complex and far-flung camp systems (with the Soviet, before World War II, being considerably larger, housing nearly 1.7 million people in 1939, compared with 60,000 in Germany) that isolated, punished, restricted, and reformed dissenters in immense numbers, well before Germany first built death camps in 1941. Tolerance was equated with weakness, and enemies were defined as those whose support was suspect. The cost of dissent was more than physical insecurity, but the loss of individual identity and the capacity to communicate.

The dictatorships professed to solve these various problems better than the democracies. They also claimed to be better democracies. As antiliberal democracies, they offered mass mobilization and participation through approved political parties, buttressed by strong images of popular support and national unity.[95] Their governments, they insisted, were modern, secular, and largely popular, sustained by consent alongside repression. By advancing a social agenda, producing economic results, and mobilizing the population, they "caught the parliamentary powers off guard" by advancing policy answers without going through the route of democratic lawmaking.[96] "The Fascist State," Giovanni Gentile wrote, "is a people's state, and, as such, the democratic State *par excellence*." Through the party, it uses and reflects "the thought and will of the masses." For this reason, the regime undertakes what he described as "the enormous task" of "trying to bring the whole mass of the people . . . inside the fold of the Party."[97] Similarly, Stalin declared in 1936, "We understand democracy as the raising of the activeness and consciousness of the party mass, as the systematic involving of the party mass not only in the discussion of questions but also in the leadership to work."[98] According to these readings, the key to democracy was just the reverse of its liberal understanding, which insisted on the separation of state and society. Here, by contrast, the ethical and political unity of the people and their state was a central principle, thus bypassing entirely the need for representative legislative institutions.

The countries on both sides of the divide were aware of what the others were doing. They knew and studied one another's policy prescriptions, observed their political and technical counterparts, and borrowed where they thought appropriate. "The Soviet-watching Nazis suppressed existing trade unions, and sought to organize their own new ones; the Japanese, watching the Nazis, would do the same."[99] And the United States watched as well, absorbing and

learning where possible, as the Roosevelt administration did when it sent Louis Brownlow, Charles Merriam, and Luther Gulick—each a leading student of public administration who, together, composed the president's Committee on Administrative Management, which Brownlow chaired—to Rome to study how Benito Mussolini's government had organized Fascism's administration, and then used what they found to make extensive recommendations for the reorganization of America's national government. It called for the abolition of regulatory agencies in order to strengthen the executive branch, advocating placing them under the authority of the president's cabinet departments, a suggestion Congress refused to enact.[100]

Facing many common challenges, each regime measured the accomplishments of its arts of ruling by where it stood in this competitive game.[101] "Notwithstanding the distinctiveness of their ideology and many of their practices," the historian of the Soviet Union Stephen Kotkin has observed, these regimes "were part of an international conjuncture, and compared themselves to others."[102] They sometimes produced similar policy prescriptions, such as the use of public labor camps to put redundant labor to work.[103]

In the 1930s and early 1940s, the competition pit the constitutional democracies in Europe and North America against a wide array of authoritarian alternatives. Most, including Japanese militarism, Italian Fascism, and German Nazism, were defeated during World War II. But the rivalry between dictatorship and democracy did not come to an end after the war; rather, it took a new form, with Soviet Communism facing off against late–New Deal America, and with each crusading, literally armed to the teeth.

Although American majorities were never drawn to the models crafted by the dictatorships, their seeming success did attract tens of thousands, including visible and articulate intellectuals and organizational leaders. In the United States, other forms of economy and politics beckoned. Some looked to the Soviet Union, envious of its capacity to deploy multiyear plans to rapidly modernize and surmount the speculative boom and crisis patterns of capitalism, and for its propertyless class structure. Over the course of the 1930s, Communist Party rallies often filled the twenty thousand seats in New York's Madison Square Garden. By 1938, some 75,000 Americans had joined the Communist Party, and many others participated in post–1935 popular-front organizations, many of which were sponsored by the Party.[104]

Excitement about the Soviet experiment formed a component of left-of-center ideology during the 1930s and 1940s. Famously, Walter Duranty, a *New York Times* journalist with a strong pro-Soviet tilt, explained why he had decided not to file deliberately "lost stories" that described the human cost of the first Five-Year Plan, stating that "what matters to me is the facts, that is to say whether the Soviet drive to Socialism is or is not successful irrespective of the cost. . . . In the course of the last seven years, this country has made an unprecedented capital investment in socialized industry and has simultaneously converted agriculture from narrow and obsolete individualism to modern Socialist methods. What is more both of these operations have been carried out with success. Their cost in blood and other terms of human suffering has been prodigious, but I am not prepared to say that it is unjustified," he stated, concluding that "any plan, however rigid, is better than no plan at all and that any altruistic end, however remote, may justify any means, however cruel."[105]

In June 1936, in assessing Stalin's new constitution as a welcome "loosening of the bonds of dictatorship," the editors of *The New Republic* drew on the adulatory report of Beatrice and Sidney Webb and an account by the journalist Louis Fischer (who had declared, despite March

1933 reports about the massive famine, especially in Ukraine, that "there is no starvation in Russia," a statement he later recanted in *The God That Failed*[106]) that "the Soviet system has always contained more genuine democracy than outsiders have realized. . . . The essential power in the Soviet Union has never rested entirely with the government," citing the Webbs, who had concluded that the Soviet Union "has been the very opposite of dictatorship."[107]

The appeal of the Soviet Union extended into unexpected places, including the American Civil Liberties Union. "If American workers, with no real liberties but to change masters, or, rarely, to escape from the working class, could understand their class interests," its director, Roger Baldwin, wrote in 1934, "Soviet 'workers democracy' would be their goal." Baldwin had been a champion of freedom at home. He had led the ACLU's challenge of the ban on *Ulysses*, and had involved his organization in the Scopes trial and the murder trial of Ferdinando Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. Yet he endorsed the abandonment of liberal democracy in the Soviet Union. Freedom in the USSR, he wrote, is "fixed on the only ground on which liberty really matters—economic. No class to exploit the workers and peasants; wide sharing of control in the economic organizations; and the wealth produced is common property," and he declared that "the Soviet Union has already created liberties far greater than exist elsewhere in the world."[108] Baldwin was hardly alone; he was joined in his sentiments by, for example, Edmund Wilson, who extolled the Soviet Union in *Travels in Two Democracies.*[109]

Others flirted with Fascism, and still more, including leaders of the country's most important universities, refused to take principled stands against such regimes.[110] Some were attracted to strong-leader right-wing models. Richard Washburn Child, reflecting on his experiences in Rome as ambassador when the fascists had seized power, celebrated the young regime in 1924 in *The Saturday Evening Post*, the country's largest weekly magazine, with a circulation of nearly four million: "When a spirited people cannot stand it any longer, they act." The institutions of liberal democracy, he mused, "are luxuries enjoyed by these people who do not face intolerable situations. . . . When a people face an intolerable situation the real ravenous hunger is not for a program, but for a man."[111] Four years later, he gushed in a foreword to the Duce's *Autobiography* that "it may be forecast that no man will exhibit dimensions of permanent greatness equal to that of Mussolini," a "man who had made a state. . . . He takes responsibility for everything—for discipline, for censorship, for measures which, were less rigor required, would appear repressive and cruel. . . . Time has shown he is wise and humane."[112] Even in the mid-1930s, not on the fringe but in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, the most moderate and respectable of learned journals, a pro-Fascist opponent of the New Deal (tried for sedition in 1944) explained why he did not agree with those, such as former president Herbert Hoover and Socialist Norman Thomas, who attacked the New Deal as similar to Fascism. They were assuming, Lawrence Dennis wrote, that "fascism is per se something to be feared or fought." Rather, he argued, "it appears to me that prevailing social forces the world over make a fascist trend the inevitable alternative to chaos or communism."[113]

Many Americans drawn to Fascism were attracted by its trope of ethnic solidarity. The Italian-American linguist Mario Pei celebrated in 1935 how "the Italian people today are enjoying a new and different type of liberty. They are enjoying themselves as members, part and parcel, of a powerful, organic state, which rules for the welfare of everybody and not in the interests of a chosen few, a state which has social justice within and international prestige without its borders."[114] Led by the self-styled American Führer, Fritz Kuhn, the pro-Nazi Amerikadeutscher

Bund (German American Bund) attracted approximately 100,000 members. Some twenty thousand, many dressed in Nazi garb and chanting "Heil Hitler," descended on Madison Square Garden, which was decorated with swastikas and American flags for this "Mass Demonstration for True Americanism" on February 20, 1939, where they listened as speakers asserted the rights of Gentiles, denounced the New Deal as a "Jew Deal," and referred to President Roosevelt as "Frank D. Rosenfeld." By this time, the Bund was closely cooperating with Father Charles Coughlin, whose appeals had grown stridently anti-Semitic.

VII.

With the boundaries and capacities of liberal democracy in question, and with incremental fine tuning to the status quo absent as a real option, fear defined the context within which political action in the United States proceeded. It also served as a motivation to act. Such circumstances required making decisions that were more fundamental than picking alternatives or choosing possibilities. Fateful and transformative, New Deal decisions were more fundamental, more likely to be irrevocable. What was unclear was whether America's political institutions could tame fear and produce tolerable risk at least as well as the dictatorships.[115]

This was what Franklin Roosevelt pledged to do on that blustery March day in 1933 when he had identified how "fear itself . . . paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." As he, his successor, and their colleagues sought to counter the dictatorships in an increasingly desperate world, they risked informal cooperation and formal alliances with partners of necessity. As anxiety, disillusion, and doubt afflicted the American polity, neither the dilemma of dirty hands nor questions about democracy's abilities could be evaded.