FROM THE LONELY CROWD TO THE CULTURAL CONTRADICTIONS OF CAPITALISM AND BEYOND: THE SHIFTING GROUND OF LIBERAL NARRATIVES

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This paper investigates how key social issues related to American culture, social character, and politics are addressed in the work of two of America’s leading liberal sociologists, David Riesman and Daniel Bell. It maps out the trajectory of Riesman’s and Bell’s early contributions to a critique of mass society in post-war America, as well as Bell’s later formulation of “liberalism in crisis” and his assessment of culture in The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism. This analysis pays particular attention to the intellectual, biographical, and social settings that helped to shape the often conflicting ideas of each thinker, and examines the discursive shifts within liberal thinking as it attempted to explain and deal with perceived new social crises from the 1950s to the present. © 2004 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

The trajectory from David Riesman’s The Lonely Crowd (1950/1969) to Daniel Bell’s The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (1976/1986a) and beyond offers us an opportunity to examine not only the shifting terrain of cultural theory at mid-century, but also the role that intellectuals played in forming cultural politics and the critical challenges they provoked. This paper presents a context for understanding the ideas of Riesman and Bell, examines their contributions to a liberal critique of mass society theory, and provides a brief critical view of some of Bell’s ideas on post-industrial society and its cultural contradictions. The underlying task is to examine some of the reasons for the shift in liberal discourse at different historical junctures: from Cold War celebration of modernity, personal expression, and a defense of American mass culture; to, especially with regard to Bell’s work, a critique of “liberalist” cultural expressions in the 1960s; and, finally, to a more current communitarian appeal to some form of mediation between personal interests and obligations to the community.

I have chosen to focus on these texts because they emerged from a specific intellectual and political milieu and are unified by an underlying narrative about social character and the challenges it meets under capitalism. They are also narratives of liberalization at different historical stages. By narratives of liberalization, I mean that the post-war political consciousness of liberalism—established along the lines of pluralism, consensus, and the defense of individual expression and rights—is represented as a principal authority that informs social theory, explains social issues, identifies potential problems, and offers a “resolution” to those problems. I view narratives similarly to the way in which Clifford Geertz views social theory, as “maps of meaning” or symbolic templates that try to render social situations as meaningful (1973, p. 220). These maps are never, I would add, inert. Once produced, they enter into the world of power and representation and, following Foucault (1980), they become part of the construction of realities that serve one purpose or another. They suggest or adumbrate one reality and at the same time efface other representations. I read these texts primarily as the products of creative and interpretive imaginations mapping out the new social terrain of post-war

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America, and then position them among the relationships of institutional structures, culture, and politics. I do not believe that social thinkers are mechanically determined by ideology, class, biography, or economic history, but these forces are inevitably present and ideas are in turn shaped by history and social experience.

THE ROLE OF INTELLECTUALS, MASS SOCIETY, AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF POST-WAR AMERICA

By the 1950s, according to Daniel Bell, the theory of mass society had become, "apart from Marxism, the most influential social theory in the Western world" (1960/1966a, p. 21). There are radical, liberal, and conservative versions of this critique, but, whatever their political orientation, many early twentieth-century theorists explained modern society in terms of a tendency toward bureaucratic administration, greater individual isolation, ideological control of public opinion through the mass media, and the use of irrational appeals by authoritarian and charismatic leaders. For some of these thinkers, the modern unaffiliated person living in a large urban center is vulnerable to the manipulation of a centralized power. Hannah Arendt, in her provocative work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951/1968), explained both Stalinist and fascist totalitarianism in terms of the effects of propaganda, the loss of social status for many social groups, and feelings of political disorientation. The masses' incomprehension of modern life stems from their uprootedness and their inability to satisfy common interests, while their embrace of totalitarianism is linked to their psychological need to escape from a world where meaning and coherence have been lost. The willingness of the masses to accept totalitarian father figures represented to Arendt a "revolt of the masses against realism and common sense" (p. 50), which manifested itself in collective urges to look up to a leader, vent aggressive impulses, and search for scapegoats.

Within a decade, some of these assumptions came under increasing assault by a new generation of social scientists, especially in the United States (see Kornhauser, 1959). David Riesman criticized Arendt's overarching concepts of totalitarian control by focusing on the plasticity of human behavior. Noting how difficult it is to destroy people psychologically and make them subject to a single powerful force, Riesman suggested that human flexibility is evident in people's "refusal to internalize the system's ethical norms." Opposition to totalitarian political systems can take the forms of "quiet defiance, evasion, sly sabotage" (1952/1964a, p. 85). Daniel Bell's more general argument against mass society theory was that the organization of social life is still full of "richly stratified social relationships" (1960/1966a, p. 25). People belong to many organized and informally organized groups that satisfy common interests, not to some anonymous mass composed of isolated individuals subject to the imperatives of bureaucracy and propaganda.

Edward Shils was another of the most vocal, or perhaps acerbic, critics of mass society theory. Shils's *betes noires* were the Frankfurt School, the neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, and cultural critic Dwight Macdonald, who to Shils were the leading exponents of left-leaning mass society theory. "If one were to take seriously the ideas of the Frankfurt School and of Dwight Macdonald," wrote an exercised Shils, "one would believe that the ordinary citizen who listens to the radio, goes to films and looks at television, is ... a 'private atomic subject', utterly without religious belief, without a private life, without a family which means anything to him; he is ... empty of meaning ... petrified and brutalized" (1957, pp. 596–597). What the enemies of mass society fail to recognize, suggested Shils, is that it produces a more autonomous artist, a better informed public and a more democratic society. It has not led to the extinction but the revitalization of the individual and has produced "an in-
tensified individualism” (p. 597), more open to new experiences, novel sensations, and a range of wider emotions.

With these declarations, Shils added his voice to the growing chorus of intellectuals critical of mass society theory. They viewed modernity as part of the developmental process of democratization, political pluralism, and greater individuation. Many sociologists and historians contributed to the emergent liberal narrative: Shils, Riesman, Bell, Martin Lipset, Paul Lazarsfeld (Lazarsfeld & McPhee, 1954), and Talcott Parsons among the sociologists, and Richard Hofstadter (1955, 1963), Daniel Boorstin (1953), and Louis Hartz (1955) as the most prominent among the historians. Their attacks on the various existing versions of mass society theory reflected American optimism in its political institutions and culture, and its dominance in world affairs after the Second World War. In response to Stalinism, many intellectuals accepted what became the legacy of anti-communist liberalism. Liberals like Arthur Schlesinger Jr. (1949) announced the necessity of forming a “Vital Center” both to protect individual liberties and fight against left-wing authoritarianism. The decision of a substantial part of the Cold War intellectual generation to “choose the West” helped to consolidate ideas and formulate certain rhetorical replies to earlier theories of mass society by placing new emphasis on the autonomy and expressive powers of the individual and the therapeutic value of mass consumption, and defending the expanded freedoms and rights the modern West assures its citizens.

In the post-war period, American mass culture swiftly became a contested terrain. Older, conservative, and Marxist-oriented theories of mass society stressed its negative, homogenizing, and controlling effects. Most of the liberal critiques focused rather enthusiastically on its benefits. Cultural critic Andrew Ross maintained, in his insightful essay “Containing Culture in the Cold War,” that during the post-war period intellectuals “perhaps for the first time in American history had the opportunity to recognize themselves as rational agents of... moral and political leadership” (1989, p 42). Many of them became figures of “cultural authority” who affirmed a “national American culture” constructed along the lines of liberal pluralism, consensus, and the negligible importance of class in America.1 In the new liberal discussion, socialist analyses of mass culture as ideological control had to be “contained” or “quarantined” (p. 43) from the national mind, partly because it challenged American liberal interests, but largely as a response to Cold War pressure to reject any socialist ideas that would “contaminate” the American body politic.

Though the whole weight of intellectual culture made it difficult to think otherwise, there were those like C. Wright Mills who resisted the prevailing intellectual fashion at the personal price of increasing isolation (Horowitz, 1983). Mills excoriated the liberal intelligentsia for their “pretentious smugness.” “In self-selected coteries,” wrote Mills, liberal intellectuals “confirm one another’s mood” (1956/1959, p. 337). Critical of liberal pluralist ideology, Mills’s barbed comment was aimed at those intellectuals, like Bell and Riesman, who were particularly disparaging of his thesis that America was ruled by an interlocking system of powerful elites, but he also pinpointed how “the liberal rhetoric” placed a chill on critical thinking and marginalized dissenting voices within the American academy. Fully supported by the power of the state, the liberal rhetoric became a barrier to methodological and disci-

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1. Liberal critics were by no means united in their views of mass culture. Ross identifies three main positions in what he calls the post-war mass culture debate: the aesthetic-liberal position, which decries the fact that the majority of people will choose lowbrow culture over highbrow culture; the progressive-evolutionist position, which claims that mass culture socializes people into the new capitalist consumerist society; and finally, the socialist position, which views mass culture as a form of social control.
plinary self-questioning. Scholars who refused to support the Cold War consensus suffered shunning by colleagues, firing, loss of tenure, forced appearances before collegiate and state boards, hostile newspaper stories, FBI investigations, or worse (Caut, 1978; Schrecker, 1986; Novick, 1988). The views of the liberal intelligentsia were a ubiquitous force. Their ideas became, following Michel Foucault (1966/1973), a “discourse,” part of the pervasive and familiar organized army of catchphrases, stereotypes, idée reçus, metaphors, and illustrations called up to represent an assured and self-mythologizing picture of American society while demonizing its political enemies.

We can identify at least four general tendencies in liberal discourse. First, it argued for a limited effect of media influence (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) and moved the focus of research to the individual, social psychological effects of the media rather than its overall ideological influence. Second, it viewed “mass culture” and “popular culture” as having the positive integrative function of providing mass audiences with new expressive roles, identities, patterns of consumption, and forms of adaptation to changing social system (Riesman, 1950/1969; Shils, 1957). Third, there was a general retreat from class-based analyses of society and politics and new stress on consensus and how different “interest,” “status,” and “veto” groups fight for advantage in a society that has accepted the inevitability of corporate capitalism (Riesman, 1950/1969; for an analysis of American right wing politics that follows this model, see also Lipset and Parsons in Bell’s ed. 1956/1964). Finally, at its most triumphalist, liberal intellectuals celebrated the “end of ideology” (Bell 1960/1966a) and claimed that after the Second World War, the utopian ideas usually associated with leftist ideology had been exhausted.

The rise of post-war liberal discourse is seen by many commentators as part of the de-radicalization of American intellectual life (Mills, 1956; Wald, 1986; Brick, 1986; Ross, 1989; Coleman, 1989; Aronowitz, 1996; Saunders, 2000). There are many explanations for the decline of intellectual radicals, including their own desire for respectability and acceptance by the nation’s political and economic elites, an issue that was especially relevant to Daniel Bell but only minimally to David Riesman. Both Bell and Riesman were part of the post-World War II generation caught up in the politics of the Cold War and American post-war military and cultural dominance. They were both American Jewish intellectuals, but they came from very different class backgrounds and expressed different sensibilities. Indeed, a comparison of their autobiographies is a study in contrasts.

Bell came from a Polish-Jewish immigrant working-class background. His father died when he was one year old. Like many New York intellectuals of his generation, Bell no longer felt completely at home in his immigrant world and Anglicized the family name from Bolotsky to Bell, but he did not feel at ease in gentile America either. His Brooklyn upbringing led him at the early age of 13 to join the Young People’s Socialist League (YPS), the youth organization of the Socialist Party (Bell, 1966a, p. 299), an organization that stressed chang-

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2. In the authoritative narratives of communication theory, the “limited effects” model is represented as a paradigm shift from an older “hypoemic needle” theory where messages are seen as being injected into the minds of the audience, to a new powerful theory, which, for a good part of two decades, dominated sociological communication studies in America. In the “limited effects” model the effects of the media are filtered through a variety of social and psychological lenses, such as “reference groups,” “opinion leaders,” and “individual predispositions.” (See Gitlin, 1978).

3. The clearest sociological articulation of this kind of analysis can be found in Herbert Gans’s Popular Culture and High Culture (1974), a text that was based on a series of papers Gans wrote in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Gans originally outlined this thesis in a graduate paper for a seminar with David Riesman at the University of Chicago in 1950. (See Gans, 1990).
ing society nonviolently through the trade-union movement. He continued his political education at the working-class City College of New York in the now legendary, and perhaps romanticized, Alcove Number 1 at City College cafeteria where the likes of Nathan Glazer debated the knotty sectarian politics of American socialism and the authoritarian heavyhandedness of the Stalinist-led American Communist Party.

After its near demise in the 1920s, the American Communist Party was able to take advantage of the opportunities that the Great Depression and the fascist threat had to offer. At its peak during the Popular Front period (1935–1939) the party doubled its size from roughly 40,000 in 1936 to 82,000 by the end of 1938” (Schrecker, 1998, p. 15). By taking a lead in antifascist activities in the United States, the party made a strong appeal to one key group: upwardly mobile, second-generation, urban Jews (Glazer, 1961, pp. 130–168; Howe & Coser, 1962). Its growth and influence was especially evident in New York City, which accounted for nearly 40% of the party’s total national membership, drawn disproportionately from the city’s large Jewish population. All this changed dramatically in 1939 with the Soviet Union rapprochement with Nazi Germany and the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact. Suddenly, party-sponsored antifascist activities evaporated. This was seen as a great betrayal, a shocking, unimaginable reversal, even worse than the Moscow purge trials of the late 1930s. The battle lines were quickly drawn between those who continued to support the Communist Party and those who turned their backs on it and supported other left antifascist groupings. At City College, which was a remarkable school for Jewish talent—its 1937 graduating class remains the only one in American history to graduate three future Nobel laureates—the supporters of the Communist Party were located in Alcove Number 2 in the dingy college basement dining room, while the socialist anticommunists were in Alcove Number 1 (Dorman, 2001).

In the late 1930s, Bell became an associate editor of the conservative socialist paper New Leader, where he concentrated on labor issues. The New Leader articulated a nominally socialist worldview that promoted a sophisticated but intense brand of anticommunism. By the late 1940s, Bell had abandoned his working-class political radicalism for a variant of the postwar liberal ethic. After spending much of the decade in teaching positions at the University of Chicago and in Palo Alto and establishing his “bona fides” with some of America’s leading liberal anticommunists, in 1949, Bell joined the staff of Fortune magazine. In his first major publication, Marxist Socialism in the United States (1952/1996b), Bell wrote about the failure of Marxist thought to gain a viable home in the United States. Marxist ideas were alien to American life, and had no future in its politics, he argued. His anticommunist rhetoric, typically infused with distasteful for what he characterized as the party’s unprincipled opportunism, presented a caricature of all American Marxists as Caligari-like somnambulists under the mind control of the Party.4 At Fortune, Bell wrote about labor issues in order to provide a broader audience with a better understanding of the liberal position on American capitalism. While he dismissed the class struggle, he did not deny that there were often quite severe and disruptive social conflicts. In keeping with the liberal pluralistic ideology, however, Bell portrayed them as struggles within or between special interest groups such as labor, farmers, ethnic or racial minorities, or the military, which could be negotiated, ameliorated, or resolved within the traditions of the American political system.

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4 Bell’s 1952 book Marxist Socialism in the United States was actually written in 1949 but first appeared in print a few years later in a volume that was part of the Princeton University series Socialism in American Life. A second edition appeared in 1967, and once again in 1996 with an introduction by Michael Kazin. For a good critique of Bell’s thesis, especially his selective representation of historical details, see Julius Jacobson’s (1997) article in New Politics.
Historian Ellen Schrecker noted that the New York intellectuals, were "largely responsible for teaching American liberals how to think about Communism. . . . [and] . . . the formulations that they crafted helped to structure the way in which the anticommunist political repression of the McCarthy years functioned" (1998, p. 79). The New York Jewish intellectual world had a formative influence on Bell's work and politics. Bell, writing about the seasoning experience of this intellectual group, noted that, before the war, "there was a real sense of exclusion from America." Anti-semitism of course contributed to the feeling of separation, while education was perceived as a way in. "In a sense, going to College could be called a conversion to culture, coming out of a slum and ghetto background and finding a whole world open that they have never known before" (1980a, p. 131). After the war, as America began to dominate the globe both militarily and through the "soft power" of its media and culture, many American intellectuals from working-class backgrounds who had felt outside or on the fringes of the American political and academic systems, began to feel a part of the larger culture. The war had opened up new academic opportunities. After working for Fortune, Bell taught at Columbia University in the sociology department where he had been a graduate student. He did not complete a Ph. D. dissertation, but when Bell was about to receive tenure at Columbia he was awarded a Ph. D. on the basis of his previous written work, The End of Ideology (see Bloom, 1986, p. 430). After a youthful flirtation with socialism, Bell became a lifelong Democrat.

Riesman was never a socialist nor is he associated with the New York Jewish intellectual world, though he knew many of them personally and worked closely with Nathan Glazer. Riesman's liberalism was part of his cultural and social inheritance. He came from an assimilated, well-to-do German-Jewish family with a strong progressive tradition. He was raised in what he termed "an agnostic rationalist" household. His father was a successful medical doctor and a professor of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. His mother had led her class in Bryn Mawr College and was an intellectual force in her own right, but very critical of herself and her son for not being "first rank," a harsh judgment that the young David internalized and which later was to cause him a great deal of psychological unease.

While an undergraduate at Harvard, Riesman became editor of the student paper, The Crimson, where he made education his beat, marking the beginning of his lifelong interest in progressive educational reform. In 1931, Riesman traveled to the Soviet Union on a personal fact-finding tour. He came home from the trip with the leading American educational reformer and philosopher, John Dewey. Both returned without illusions about the Soviet vision of a better world. Riesman integrated smoothly into the Harvard intellectual milieu, where he reportedly thrived as undergraduate and a law student (Riesman, 1984, 1980). After graduating from Harvard Law School, he studied under the leading neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Harry Stack Sullivan, and later he accepted a position at the fledgling University of Buffalo Law School where he taught for several years. During a one-year fellowship at Columbia University Law School (1941–1942), he met the éminence grise of the New York intellectuals, Lionel Trilling, and was introduced to the editors and writers of Partisan Review and Commentary. Riesman subsequently moved to New York City and briefly became an assistant district attorney. During the period that spanned both his stay at the University of Buffalo and his role as assistant district attorney, Riesman, largely to please his mother, who wanted someone to talk to while she was undergoing analysis under Karen Horney, agreed to go into analysis under Erich Fromm, who was at time Karen Horney's lover. (For further commentary about Horney and her relationship to Fromm, see Rubins, 1978 and Quinn, 1987.) The analysis proved fruitful, but more important for his intellectual development were Fromm's theories of social character. Fromm's work with Ernst Schacter on German workers in the 1930s
and their willingness to support the Nazi party became key to Riesman's own theories of social character, which he merged with the American sociological tradition of "community studies" of the Chicago School and the social anthropology of the "culture and personality" tradition. (For more on Riesman's early life, see Riesman, 1984, 1990.)

In the late 1940s, Edward Shils invited Riesman to join the faculty at the University of Chicago where he established himself as a sociologist with the publication of *The Lonely Crowd* (1950/1969) and *Faces in the Crowd* (1952/1965). *The Lonely Crowd* was edited by Nathan Glazer for an early paperback marketed to college students (1955) under the editorial guidance of Jason Epstein at Anchor Books, and it became the best-selling sociology text in North America and continues to be so today, with over 1.4 million copies sold (Gans, 1997). Fromm's crucial influence, along with Riesman's own integration of the ideas of Thorstein Veblen, Max Weber, and Alexis de Tocqueville, contributed to the creation of a compelling and creative argument that Riesman used to explore manifestations of modern American life.

We should also not forget that *The Lonely Crowd* is a co-authored book bearing the lesser imprints of both Nathan Glazer, as already noted, and Reuel Denney, whose later book *The Astonished Muse* (1957) offered idiosyncratic but keen observations on 1950s American popular culture and remains one of the more interesting sociological treatments of the topic that came out of that period.

Riesman's intellectual and political trajectory, as Nathan Glazer (1990) put it, was from "liberalism to sociology." With the publication of *The Lonely Crowd*, he became a prominent American social scientist. Though he never received a Ph.D. in sociology, *The Lonely Crowd* made Riesman into one of the leading sociologists in the United States. The forcefulness of his critique as well as the boldness of his generalizations about American culture won Riesman a wide readership, and he became one of the first academics to make the cover of Henry Luce's *Time* magazine. And while in alliance with liberal anticommonsists, Riesman remained a measured liberal, relatively free from the clamping demands of the American triumphalism of the period.

**Reading Riesman and Bell Contrapuntally**

These brief sketches of Riesman and Bell's early lives give a sense of their different backgrounds and are intended to identify them as members of an intellectual coterie—traditional intellectuals in Gramsci's language (1971)—who present themselves as heirs to and defenders of American liberal values and who disseminate ideas to a larger audience. Riesman and Bell are exemplary public intellectuals. Charles Kadushin's sociological study *The American Intellectual Elite* (1974), describes Riesman as one of the most respected and influential intellectuals of his period. Russell Jacoby, in *The Last Intellectuals* (1987), uses Bell as an example of the kind of public intellectual who felt at home both in the academy and in the larger public forum that American culture used to produce (see also Bender, 1992, and Posner, 2001). Unlike many present day high-power academics who shy away from dreaded undergraduate teaching, both Riesman and Bell were committed undergraduate teachers who mentored many young students who later became prominent in their chosen fields. Education was for both an integral part of the liberal imagination and cultural legitimation and each...

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5 The historical rise and transformation of American academic intellectuals and their relationship to public life have been discussed by Russell Jacoby in *The Last Intellectuals* (1987) and by Thomas Bender in *Intellect and Public Life* (1992). The failings of public intellectuals have also been enumerated, most recently by Richard Posner in *Public Intellectuals* (2001).
wrote on the subject, Riesman more extensively (Riesman, 1958a; Jencks & Riesman, 1968; Lipset & Riesman, 1975; Grant & Riesman, 1978; Riesman, 1980) and less ideologically than Bell (Bell, 1966b; Bell & Kristol, 1968) who saw education principally as a way of promoting a “conversion to liberal culture” (1966b; 1980).

The influence of Riesman and Bell on the American academy and liberal culture was considerable. My intention, however, is not to portray them as ventriloquists for the regnant liberal discourse, for they also deviated from it, and their texts demonstrated tensions and contradictions in the very liberal discourses they were championing. The two authors had distinct temperaments, backgrounds, and academic interests, and they chose different ways to contribute to the defining politics of their times. Thus, much can be gained from, in Edward Said’s words, a “contrapuntal reading” (2000) of their works in order to examine how the disparate aspects of the liberal experience work with and also against each other. Riesman’s interests were in social psychology, leisure, popular culture, and education, and his contributions to a liberal critique of mass society were often tentative and more even-handed than Bell’s, whose predilection for the sweeping panoramic view lost the details that Riesman seldom missed. Riesman was cool, while Bell was often hot and noisy. He was ironic and discriminatingly observant, while Bell could be cocksure and sometimes heedless in his social predictions.

In various autobiographical articles, Riesman revealed how he was often bemused by his own “Quixotic idealism,” a phrase that frequently recurs in many of his self-revelatory writings. Though his idealism is portrayed as something of an awkward embarrassment, he was unwilling to relinquish it. Temperamentally and intellectually, Riesman was removed from the overzealous anticomunism of the New York intellectuals, a point well-illustrated by his break with the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Bell, along with Sidney Hook, Richard Hofstadter, Diana and Lionel Trilling, and many others, had joined in the formation of the American Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) whose stated aim was to combat Communism in its remaining American outposts, and internationally. As Christopher Lasch (1969) remarked about the cultural climate of the Cold War, many leading intellectuals rallied around the CCF and the defense of American culture and capitalism as the best available models for the West because they were attracted to the ideas of cultural freedom and the defense of modernism. It was later disclosed that the Congress was funded by the American CIA through a front organization called the Fairfield Foundation. (For treatments of the CCF and the CIA, see Lasch, 1969; Coleman, 1989, and Saunders, 2000). The more specific aim of the Congress was to counter the tendency toward “neutrality” on the part of many American intellectuals during the Cold War and the Korean conflict in particular. Taking a neutral position was seen as playing into the hands of American communists who were said to be extremely influential within those groups that supported neutrality. Riesman, who was also a member of the CCF, resigned from the congress very early on, critical of the lack of perspective of many of its members who saw the United States in terms of the struggle in which they

6. Beginning in 1950, the CIA financed the Congress, along with a series of politically liberal and strongly anti-communist publications. The CIA not only funded Encounter, founded in 1953 by Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol, but also Tempo Presepe in Italy, edited by Nicola Chiaramonte, Pravda in Paris, and Der Monat in Germany. While some of the intellectuals who supported the Congress and wrote for Encounter were unaware of the CIA involvement, it does speak to the political climate of the Cold War period and the ways in which intellectuals were used or co-opted when their ideas were aligned with the political interests of American foreign and domestic policies. Given the discursive influence of “choosing the West” and the ways in which the message was disseminated, otherwise iconoclastic intellectuals felt compelled to take sides.
had been engaged against the Communist Party in New York. In later years, Riesman worked on behalf of the nuclear test ban, and argued with C. P. Snow that without nuclear disarmament nuclear war was not only a probability but a certainty. He founded the influential Committee of Correspondence, which had branches on many American campuses, and he published the Newsletter, which reflected a variety of ideas about peace and the movement against nuclear development. Some of the most capable leaders of the growing peace movement came through these branches, as did some of the precursors of the American New Left, such as Tom Hayden and Marcus Raskin.

Riesman, who died in May 2002 at the age of 92, left an important intellectual legacy that was to inspire a considerable number of American social scientists. His work can be placed within a long tradition of social analysis that takes the pulse of the American national mood. Despite their differences in theoretical and methodological approaches, the Lynds' studies of Middletown (1929, 1937), Riesman's The Lonely Crowd, Bell's more recent The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism, Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton's, Habits of the Heart (1985), and political scientist Robert Putnam's Bowling Alone (2000), all focus on cultural patterns of behavior, prevailing beliefs and values found in society, and how underlying economic and cultural changes affect an individual's identity and sense of social and political responsibility. In an age when the social sciences have undergone extensive specialization, critics often denounce these texts and the public intellectuals who wrote (and continue to write) them for their alleged overgeneralization and stereotypical portrayal of national character (see Posner, 2001). But it is precisely in their broad attempts to define a national social character and their willingness to offer an antidote to a perceived American social malaise, from a decidedly liberal perspective, that we can evaluate their ideological importance.

Nathan Glazer, a contributor to the writing of The Lonely Crowd, asserted that he had followed a different track from Riesman's path "from socialism to sociology" (1990), a formulation that implies that sociology can rise above ideology and move towards a higher level of objective realism. Bell took a similar political road and shared corresponding views about sociological analysis. Bell placed himself as part of a "twice born generation," (1960/1966a, p. 300) that took up socialism in the 1930s but became disenchanted and consequently more wary of utopian political visions. The widespread disillusionment with "the God that failed" (Crossman, 1949), as a hugely popular text of that period put it, was driven by a sense of betrayal, and Bell cast himself as a hard-bitten realist. Maturity had forced him to abandon his first enthusiastic love for radical ideas, while realism, or perhaps more accurately, the conviction of realism, allowed him to seem to soar above ideology.

Bell is an encyclopedic writer and a self-proclaimed generalist who, as he declared with irony, "specializes in everything" (1980, p. 323). His books are marked by extraordinary learning, a legendary ability to integrate disparate ideas, and a breadth of historical sweep. Bell's exhaustive knowledge has been compared to the fabled Chinese examinations in which the candidates were supposed to write down everything they knew. And while it is true that Bell resembles the eighteenth-century or the nineteenth-century philosophers, there is something about the weight of his erudition that gives pause. For one thing, his critical formulations, encased and encrusted with the apparatus of historical and sociological knowledge, have the ability to seduce a wide audience into accepting them as repositories of sociological wisdom. For another, Bell tends to hurl out ideas on social issues, many of them contradictory, and, given the richness of his opinions, some of them hit their mark. His political narrative is encyclopedic in yet another sense: it incorporates all political positions, even as he makes one narrative dominant, the "realist" anticommmunist position.
Bell’s central concern is with economic issues, the organization of work, politics, social policy, and culture. His interventions in the defense of liberal values have often been heated, self-evidently partisan, and impassioned, partly because they grew in the hothouse setting of New York intellectual life, where many of these issues were debated with considerable vitriol and flair, and partly because he describes his intellectual journey in the language of a religious conversion, first to socialism and secondly to liberalism or its uniquely U.S. variant, “Americanism,” which underscores the exceptional, providential nature of American vitality, wealth, individual enterprise, and equality of opportunity irrespective of class origin.7

Against classical sociology and mass society critiques of the destruction of community and culture by the forces of modernization and capitalism, Bell emphasized the exceptionalism that made American society uniquely receptive to the changes brought on by capitalist development. (For an updated version of this position, see Lipset, 1995 and Lipset & Marks, 2000). When, in the 1970s, Bell offered his analysis of post-industrial society and a liberalism in crisis, he feared that the age of American exceptionalism may be coming to an end (Bell, 1980), threatened by the “radical disjuncture” between the ability of the productive system to create unimaginable affluence and an ego-expanding hedonism promoted by American culture. As cultural critic Patrick Brantlinger reiterated neatly, the post-industrial society is heading towards “an age of potential enrichment for all,” but culture foreshadows “threats of decadence and barbarism” (1983, p. 283).

**The Lonely Crowd: Affluence, Leisure, Mass Culture and Political Power in Post-war America**

When David Riesman and his associates Nathan Glazer and poet-turned-social-critic Reuel Denney wrote *The Lonely Crowd*, they referred to the deep sense of isolation and anomie they found in post-war America. This was an America whose culture was rapidly being reoriented toward the imperative of mass consumption, and where the early studies in public opinion and voting (Lazarsfeld & McPhee, 1954) revealed an increasingly apathetic electorate. In *The Lonely Crowd*, Riesman et al looked for clues about the temper of American society and its growing middle class, and they concluded that modern mass society had “driven great numbers to anomie, has produced conformity in others,” but has also “opened up new possibilities for greater autonomy” (p. 257). Along with Erich Fromm’s *Escape from Freedom* (1941/1969), William H. Whyte Jr’s *The Organization Man* (1956) and Vance Packard’s *The Status Seekers* (1959), most of the reading public and many critics saw *The Lonely Crowd* more narrowly, as yet another critique of American conformity, and as part of the social pessimism so fashionable in this period. But a more careful analysis of the text suggests that Riesman and his associates cautiously defended and even celebrated some of the achievements of America as a modern, urban society. Theirs was an attempt, in the words of the authors, to “develop a view of society which accepts rather than rejects new potentialities for leisure, human sympathy, and abundance” (p. 160). It is, however, a curious text, full of ambivalences (Gitlin, 2000, p. 35), which manages to make a case both for and against a modern, affluent America.

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7. The idea of Americanism is discussed in Louis Hartz’s monograph, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955). Hartz provided, from a left-of-center political philosophy position, yet another account of American exceptionalism. According to Hartz, “Lockean” liberalism was the only tradition in America; conservatism, which Hartz equated with Edmund Burke, feudalism, and hierarchy, had never been truly indigenous. Because America lacked the feudal social structure and ideology appropriate to it, it was able to develop its own unique, egalitarian political culture.
The Lonely Crowd demonstrated how the “inner-directed” character of an earlier traditional American society, self-reliant, guided by inner principles and values, and shaped by an earlier ethic of denial and hard work embodied in the Protestant ethic, was transformed into someone who looks neither inward to tradition nor to the immediate family for guidance, but to others. Alexis de Tocqueville observed, back in the 1830s, that Americans, when compared to Europeans, were generally superficial, freer with money, friendly, and eager to display possessions, but more uncertain and demanding of approval. These qualities become in Riesman’s work part of a new “other-directed” social character whose anxiety is quelled by the endorsement and direction of their contemporaries (Glazer, 2000). Riesman’s “other-directed character” is someone who is cosmopolitan, works in a service-type job, lives in an urban environment where the boundaries between the familiar and the strange have broken down, is capable of rapid superficial intimacies with everyone, and yet is deeply anxious.

Riesman’s main focuses were on middle-class Americans and their values. He never seriously questioned the organizational structure of capitalist production or the alienation of work, believing instead that the impersonality of work in modern industrial societies should be viewed as a positive development since it challenged the worker to live more creatively and find greater fulfillment in leisure and play.8 That the alienation of work can be trumped by leisure and consumption has some of its roots in certain socialist utopian cultural arguments already present in the Frankfurt School (Jay, 1973, p. 213). These debates suggested that when an overorganized social system demands so much of the individual’s time, creativity, and effort, consumption offers psychological compensation and a way to enrich the self, and ultimately and however inadequately, it addresses the need to fulfill an aesthetic expression. Riesman complemented these views with American progressive ideas, already well-established in the 1920s, that appraised leisure and consumption as part of what later cultural social critics and historians called a “therapeutic ethos” (Lears, 1983, Fox, 1983), where the search for health and a revitalized sense of self, weakened by the processes of urbanization and industrialization, was linked directly to consumption. As advocated by the early marketers and public relations people of the 1920s (see also Ewen & Ewen, 1982; Schudson, 1986; and Ewen, 1996), consumption and leisure were promoted both as a boon to the psychological life of Americans, and as ways to assimilate recent immigrants.

The Lonely Crowd outlined the ways in which consumer culture can fulfill desires unmet by the challenge of work. Riesman doubted that average American workers would make significant cultural breakthroughs on their own, and toward the end of the book he urged the need for new “avocational counsellors,” people involved in tourism, fashion, decorating, architecture, or the music industry, who could help members of the public find what they want and stimulate them to use new products in more imaginative, “playful,” and “pleasurable” ways. Riesman’s call for a group of cultural advisors, very much the equivalents of a Martha Stewart in the present day, may strike us as leisure therapy for the masses, as indeed it was. In later years, Riesman, in an essay that was among the first to use the term “post-industrial

8. The radical historian Harry Braverman (1974) suggested that with the introduction of scientific management and the rationalization of work, the experience of work became so degraded that workers were encouraged to find satisfaction in consumption. At the same time, modern advertising and public relations played an increasing role in linking consumption with personal satisfaction, self-expression, and creativity—the very qualities that workers could no longer find in work. By functionally relaxing work to leisure, Riesman made it part of the realm of necessity, hence, there is no pressing need to question whether work satisfies a fundamental human need for self-expression—it is merely a necessary means to an end.
society," acknowledged the naïve presuppositions in his earlier work. "In The Lonely Crowd," he wrote, "my collaborators and I believed that it was impossible to stop automation and rationalization of work and the best answer was to find new meaning in the creative use of leisure." "We failed to see," he continued, "that leisure would prove more stultifying than satisfying" (1958b, p.168). The dreams of progressive collective improvement, the celebration of technology and rational organization, and the therapeutic ethos of individual self-expression, it seems, were broken on the shoals of American affluence.

Riesman's analysis of mass culture stood on more promising ground. Often, critics of mass culture, argued Riesman in a jab directed at the Frankfurt School's tendency to portray the mass audience as inert and compliant, failed to recognize how respectable American movies and popular novels regularly are, and how lively and knowledgeable the public is, even though they seem, "at first glance to be part of a very passive, uncreative audience" (p. 298). He concluded that critics of mass culture view jazz, the movies, and television with repulsion. And while it is true that many of these cultural products are driven by formulas and standardized by the industrial machinery that produces them, these industries have "become more flexible and could turn out products that are of even better quality." For the first time in history, suggested Riesman, "we can distribute first-class novels and non-fiction, painting, music, to audiences that can fit into patterns of great individuality" (p. 298).

Riesman was among the pioneers who explored the audience's active participation with the products of mass culture as well as the varied and complex resistances that people form against the commercial mass media. Consumers, rather than being passive, wrote Riesman, "fight back, by refusing to understand, by selective interpretation, by apathy" (1952, p. 311). The same products of mass culture, he further pointed out, can be used by the audience in different ways; a movie theater, for example, "may be used to get warm, to sleep, to neck, to learn new styles, to expand one's imaginative understanding of people and places" (1950/1964b, p. 409). As Andrew Ross commented in passing (1989, p. 239n), Riesman's willingness to associate forms of popular leisure with active, even resistant, practices broadly anticipated the later trends in cultural studies theories of subcultural resistance associated with Stuart Hall (Hall & Jefferson, 1976) and Dick Hebdige (1979). And as social theorist Stjepan Mestrovic further emphasized, there are many similarities between The Lonely Crowd and current postmodernist discourse on society and politics, so much so that upon reading The Lonely Crowd and Baudrillard's America (1989) one "will be struck by the remarkable similarities between the two visions of contemporary societies" (1997, p. 43).

While similarities between contemporary cultural theory and Riesman's work are sometimes self-evident, we should be aware of the social context within which Riesman's original ideas were developed and the broader ideological interests they promoted. Riesman's defense of the autonomy of the audience reflects the mood of Cold War liberalism. One of Riesman's comments quoted above was taken from a paper he presented at a celebrated 1952 symposium called "Our Country, Our Culture" organized by the members of the journal Partisan Review. Many of the generation of New York literary and political intellectuals associated with the journal were originally anti-Stalinist Trotskyites and defenders of high-cultural modernism against the influence of mass culture. By the early 1950s, most of them had embraced the new consensus liberalism and declared that the American environment for literary and intellectual culture had substantially improved since the war. The symposium "Our Country, Our Culture" marked a turning point for American intellectuals who now defended American modern culture. Riesman's defense of the active audience had merit in its own right since it opposed the overly simplistic passivity thesis of mass society theory. But it also fit comfortably with new and self-serving liberal discourses, especially those aspects that drew from communication
theory, which stressed that the mass media lacked the manipulative powers ascribed to them by leftists, and the new emphasis of that theory away from ideology and towards individual effects of the media.9

Riesman, of course, had no comprehensive theory of consumption as resistance and only the rudimentary theory of the active audience. Relying on much of the work of Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld (1955) on the two-step flow of communication, Riesman saw the mass media as institutions that spread new information and knowledge to a group of active opinion leaders and from them to less active members of the population through interpersonal networks. Riesman was far more critical, however, of the ways in which mass media could undermine older democratic forms of public debate, and he deplored their tendency to turn political convictions into indifference and bland tolerance. The older inner-directed character was a moralizer with a firm view of right and wrong, often indignant about political injustices. Indignation generates a great deal of emotional “affect” and “enthusiasm” which can be put in the service of personal and social change. The modern “other-directed” character is far more “tolerant” and less prone to fits of righteous indignation, more capable of holding “his emotional fire,” even “indifferent” to the social and political scene. The other-directed type, continued Riesman, is perhaps too detached from emotions to take anything seriously. For the older inner-directed character type, politics entailed conviction, while for the other-directed citizen, politics was a game. The Lonely Crowd often seems like a nostalgic yearning for the inner-directed moralizer, but Riesman was aware of this character’s main shortcomings: the intransigent moral position and inflexible superego. The inner-directed type is uncompromising; the other-directed type lacks conviction.

The key figure in the modern game of politics is the “inside-depester,” an opinion leader who knows a great deal of information about political issues and becomes a player in the shaping of public opinion. The politics of the other-directed type are more likely to be derived from the new experts in political affairs who are linked to the media. The “inside-depester,” like current-day political commentators, presumes to tell the audience the “real,” “inside” story beneath the confusing political fray. And the audiences for the “inside-depesters” are what Riesman called the “new indifferents” (p. 89); they are connected to politics neither by self-interest nor by clear emotional ties to issues—they are spectators. They view politics as a game, a form of entertainment. The dissolution of authentic emotions into a manipulation of indifferent feelings is of course a staple of postmodern thinking easily found in the works of Fredric Jameson (1991), Baudrillard (1970/1998), or Lyotard (1984), and this makes many ideas found in The Lonely Crowd seem, as Mestrovic commented, “remarkably fresh” (1997, p. 43).

American politics, many liberal theorists argued at the time, had moved towards an arena of common negotiation among groups that have mutual preferences and likings rather than mutual economic interests. Political power, wrote Riesman, is widely dispersed, and different groups are involved either in a variety of alliances or belong to “veto groups” that may keep

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9. Within American communication theory the “active audience” comes out of the “limited effects” model and was often used to lessen or mask the influence of cultural imperialism. For additional criticism of the use of the active audience along these lines, see Herbert Schiller’s Culture Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression (1989) and Living in the Number One Country (2000). This is not to say that proponents of the active audience believed that the mass media had no discernible effect on the audience. In fact, quite the opposite is true. The communication researchers of the 1950s were part of tight, interpersonal networks of sociologists and psychologists funded by the State Department, the CIA, and the Rockefeller Foundation in order to promote the use of the media for international and domestic propaganda. For an historical and sociology of knowledge treatment of this issue, see Brettaby’s The Nervous Liberals (1999) and Christopher Simpson’s The Science of Coercion (1996).
their competitors from achieving their political goals. Riesman’s formulation of power fell into the liberal pluralist model popular at the time: Power in America was not exercised by a distinctive ruling class with special economic interests but was “situational and mercurial” (p. 223). This too prefigured some aspects of current postmodernist political theory (Best & Kellner, 1991) with its erasure of the importance of class and its focus on the indeterminacy, or as Foucault called it, “the microphysics” of power. The portrayal of power as a drift of loosely coordinated coalitions prompted C. Wright Mills to chastise Riesman in The Power Elite (1956/1959) as a “romantic pluralist” who subscribed to the idea of a “semi-organized stalemate” (p. 244) among the different interest groups. Mills castigated Riesman for focusing too narrowly on a middle level of power (e.g., political parties and interest groups), and for avoiding a discussion of the overall structure of power. Regardless of their differences, however, both Riesman and Mills expressed dissatisfaction with the uncommitted politics of the 1950s, and they both revealed an admiration for an engaged autonomous citizen who bears political responsibility with seriousness and courage.

Despite the difficulties in tackling the intricate dialectical connections between leisure and work, the complicated issue of power and the legitimating and political roles of culture, there were enough innovative if problematic ideas in The Lonely Crowd to turn it into one of the most significant books of the post-war period, a text which, wrote historian Rupert Wilkinson, anticipated and influenced later works of social criticism “to a degree that is seldom appreciated” (1988, p. 16). The Lonely Crowd echoed Tocqueville’s ambivalence about American democracy. It represented a position on modernity shot through with unresolvable tensions. Like many of the sociological commentaries of the 1950s, The Lonely Crowd pointed to the deadening climate of conformity and reproached American politics for gradually fading into indifference and gamesmanship, and the public for turning into spectators. Riesman defended mass media for its educational and expressive potential, but ultimately he feared its potential power for political manipulation. He saw the audience of mass culture as active and reactive to the products of the cultural industries in a variety of creative and resistant ways, but saw mass culture as playing largely an integrative role by adjusting the other-directed character to new group norms (p. 150). Finally, Riesman pointed to a growing self-absorption and narcissism in the other-directed character type, though this type may be superceded by a more positive “autonomous character” who would move beyond self-centeredness and develop a broader psychological life and new human sympathies. The autonomous character was the type that Riesman admired the most and hoped would arise from the more progressive liberal society of the 1950s, hence, his injunction to examine the potentially liberating aspects of the new mass culture and his insistence on not selling short human resilience against totalitarian control and media manipulation.

These contradictions may be par for the course when living in a modern society: enlightenment and control, narcissism and greater self-actualization. But they also suggest the different conflicting intellectual influences on Riesman: the influence of critical theory through Erich Fromm and Riesman’s own accommodation with the new Cold War consensus. Many contemporary critics of Riesman missed the complexities of his ideas and the contradictory influences he was trying to resolve through his social analysis. In a recent invective against Riesman, Allan Bloom, in his controversial book The Closing of the American

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10. Liberal pluralists, of course, returned the criticism by arguing that Mills was vague about the power of elites. Bell (1960/1966a, p. 55) in particular claimed that Mills failed to show that the elites within the upper levels of power were either "cohesive" or shared "a community of interests."
Mind (1987), accused Riesman of assimilating nihilistic ideas from his mentor Erich Fromm and German critical theory and spreading them through The Lonely Crowd. This characterization of Riesman is oversimplified (McLaughlin, 2001). Riesman's perception of America was often sardonic and remarkably nuanced. The Jeffersonian ideal of direct democracy may no longer be possible in America. Riesman feared the popular consciousness being swallowed up by the ubiquitous apparatus of mass persuasion, but, like John Dewey (1927), one of America's foremost champions of participatory democracy, he hoped that the solution may be more democracy rather than less. The traditional democratic political public was being replaced by a modern one which, whatever its faults, still afforded viable options for some form of personal and political autonomy. The crowd was neither as irredeemably lonely and passive as many mass society theorists claimed, nor as comfortably self-directed and buoyant as Edward Shils later suggested.\(^\text{11}\)

Riesman and his colleagues, on the other hand, presented an inevitable movement of history very much in keeping with the prevailing liberal discourse of the time. The ideal type of middle-class male American, with all his underlying vulnerabilities, is held up as a model of the emerging “contemporary man.” (For various evaluations along these lines, see Lipset and Loventhal eds., 1961.) American mass culture and the psychological structure of the male, middle-class, other-directed character are presented as typical of the prospective development of other modern industrial societies. Those developing nations currently undergoing industrialization and moving in the direction of modernity would only have to look to America to discover a mirror in which to see their own future.\(^\text{12}\) This kind of analysis is of course written by those who, as Marx outlined so long ago, tend to pass off their own experiences as universal and expect others to share their perspectives, embrace their values, and applaud their heroes.

**Daniel Bell: The End of Ideology and the Management of Political Passions**

By the end of the 1950s, Bell had proclaimed the “end of ideology”\(^\text{13}\) in the West and praised the achievements of American liberalism and capitalism. He justified the economic success of capitalism because it provided answers to the challenges posed by Western society: “how, within the framework of freedom, to increase the living standards of the majority of the people and at the same time maintain or raise cultural standards” (1960/1966a, p. 38). Bell’s prophesy of the end of ideology, like Francis Fukuyama’s (1993) more recent proclamations about the “end of history,” represented an endorsement of the political and economic status quo, for which he was severely criticized at the time. C. Wright Mills attacked Bell for es-

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11. Saul Bellow’s recent book, Ravelstein (2000), is a *roman à clef* about Allan Bloom. One of the secondary characters in the book is based on Edward Shils. Like many liberal Cold Warriors, Shils had also moved from the liberal celebratory position about American mass culture to the more negative, neoconservative view that contemporary culture represents a new nihilism.

12. The Cold War spawned many variants of development theory that later came to be known as “modernization theory.” One of the most influential analysts was Daniel Lerner whose book, The Passing of Traditional Society (1958), provided a model for promoting U.S. propaganda in the Middle East and elsewhere. In Lerner’s prescription, the shift from traditional to modern society was marked by a “transition from coercion to communication” (see also Lerner, 1969). Placed within the context of Cold War geopolitics, modern communication can be used to break down traditional political convictions and nurture the new apolitical personality of a modernizing country.

13. The End of Ideology was a collection of essays Bell wrote during the 1950s for several publications including *Forus*: some smaller intellectual magazines of the period such as *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, *Encounter*, and *New Leader*; and more mainstream academic journals such as *Antioch Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology*. Many of these pieces made Bell’s reputation as a public intellectual and contain the seeds of Bell’s later work; they reflect the wide knowledge and sharp mind of one of America’s leading liberal critics and Cold Warriors.
ousing an "ideology of complacency," an intellectual celebration of apathy. Sociologist Dennis Wrong also saw Bell's argument as a retreat from politics, Michael Harrington excori-ated Bell for being an anti-ideology ideologue, and Peter Gay and Irving Howe accused him of being an ex-radical expressing self-hatred of his own past (see Waxman, 1968). These are all justifiable criticisms, but it is worth looking at why Bell believed that American capitalism had been radically transformed and why ideology was no longer central to American and, by extension, Western politics.

Bell had developed the end of ideology thesis when working at Fortune magazine from 1949–1958, a publication that championed the new style of American enterprise. Magazine mogul Henry Luce, for whom Bell worked at Fortune and with whom he had a friendly and lengthy relationship, promoted the view that a benevolent and humane American capitalism would assure that the twentieth century would become known as "The American Century." In responding to the Cold War communist threat, the editors of Fortune, in a polemical 1951 publication called USA: The Permanent Revolution, reiterated this broad message: "Fifty years ago, American capitalism seemed to be what Marx predicted it would be" (1951/1952, p. 62), but definitive changes had resulted in the "formation of a new kind of capitalism that neither Karl Marx or Adam Smith had ever dreamed of" (p. 64). The unique American version of capitalism had given the United States something to export to the rest of the world.14

The End of Ideology was in keeping with this ideological current. Bell charted a requiem for the old capitalism of social conflict, unregulated competition, and cyclical crisis, which he claimed had been supplanted by new, more rational, and socially inclusive forms of economic organization characterized by large scale planning, state intervention, technological innovation, and social cooperation. Sounding very much like a New Deal Democrat, Bell argued that American capitalism had all but eliminated many of the irrational economic elements that led to class antagonism and periodic economic breakdowns, such as those America experienced during the 1880s, 1910s, and the Great Depression of the 1930s. Under modern forms of corporate organization, the ownership and accumulation of private property and capital, usually held in the hands of a few families and sustained through inheritance, gave way to managerial control and to the meritorious group of technical experts and professionals found within the modern American corporation. The traditional capitalist ruling class had broken up and was now dispersed to a classless stratum of socially mobile and meritorious professionals.15 Modern American capitalism was for Bell both more rational, and more legitimate. It was rational because a trained technical elite was more efficient in its management of the economy than an hereditary elite, and legitimate because social power was spread more equally to those of talent and merit.

At the center of Bell's position was the claim that the American working-class commitment to radical politics had been exhausted, a victim of the unprecedented post-war affluence and the success of American capital. Ideologies, he proclaimed, tend to flourish within the masses only when the economic system could not meet their needs. America had delivered

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14 The February 1951 edition of Fortune was a special issue filled with Cubist illustrations and devoted to the promotion of American economic and cultural hegemony. It later came out as a book by Prentice Hall. The title was taken directly from Leon Trotsky's U.S.A.: The Permanent Revolution. For an astute criticism of the Fortune position from a less triumphalist liberal perspective, see the last chapter of Louis Hartz's The Liberal Tradition in America (1955).

the material, cultural, and political goods. In modern post-war America, argued Bell, rising levels of education translated into a growing appreciation of culture. Unlike Europe, which had an aristocratic tradition that established the standards of taste and excellence, the cultural elite in America were to be found in university centers such as Harvard, Columbia, and Berkeley, and theirs was "a ‘liberal culture’ receptive to ideas, critical in its outlook, and encouraging of (and sometimes nostalgic for) dissent" (p. 314). The American middle class was less conformist than theories of mass society would allow; there was less crime and social disorganization in America than during any other historical period; the post-war American suburbs created more community and togetherness than existed previously in cities; and the rising rate of divorce was an indication of freer, more individualist choices in companionship (pp. 34–39).

The End of Ideology represented a social world undergoing a rupture with the past, and as such had a powerful influence on fortifying the ideology of American capitalism. Yet the structures, privilege, and power of the old industrial system were anything but dead and to conclude that a new age had dawned, one from which old forms of relationship had disappeared, amounted to a transcendental fantasy that defined the Cold War liberal imagination of the 1950s. The all-too-visible bourgeoisie that Mills described in his extraordinary book The Power Elite found no quarter in Bell’s America. Inheritance of capital was and is a significant factor in preserving a capitalist elite (Mills, 1956/1959; Harrington, 1976; Phillips, 2002).

Furthermore, Bell was impervious to the prevailing social and economic inequalities of his times. That critique was left to the few radical intellectuals—Michael Harrington, who wrote The Other America (1962/1997), is a good example—who refused to acquiesce to the liberal self-congratulatory rhetoric. But as far as Bell was concerned, American culture had reached a high level of tolerance, inclusion and upper mobility, and he pointed to Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Sammy Davis Jr. as examples of this inclusivity. He was, on the other hand, roundly dismissive of oppositional youth groups such as the “beatniks.” The Beat generation was a “hopped up, jazzed up, souped up, self-proclaimed group of outcasts” (p. 35) and Bell ignored their criticisms, especially around issues of sexual preference and social conformity. At a time when J. Edgar Hoover saw the beatniks as a threat to American security on par with racketeers and Communism, Bell saw them, and all bohemians, as subversive of bourgeois morality, a charge he would later extend to all countercultural groups.

Bell's position was, Alan Swingewood suggested, a trickle-down “progressive evolutionist” (1977, p. 19) version of cultural democratization in which bourgeois culture and morality was held up as a model. The public developed skills in the appreciation of this culture through leisure, education, and the leadership of a cultural elite who guarded cultural values and contributed to the gradual rising of the cultural level. In this progressive vision of the future, intellectuals, cultural elites, technicians, and scientists would come to lead a new rational world order where individuals were assimilated into a seamless social consensus. It was a call for administrative rationality and an affirmation of a culture guided by a liberal elite who, while “nostalgic for dissent,” would in the end make the authoritative distinctions between serious and inauthentic forms of personal expression. Intellectuals took a “realist” stand towards politics and distanced themselves from radical democracy. Like Walter Lippmann (1922/1965) in the 1920s, Bell defined democracy as a series of formal procedures that did not require the full participation of the public. Political policies were best left to administrators who would better assess their costs and benefits, while the role of the public was to assent to or reject policies designed by experts. In this narrative, the elites of a tolerant, pluralistic society are assigned the task of protecting democracy from its own weaknesses,
Those who yearned for a strong democracy objected. C. Wright Mills, who put great faith in the ability of intellectuals to guide politics, still envisioned a democratic public involved through direct participation in the decision making, but to Bell this longing was fundamentally naïve as it would entail a return of emotions and "affect" and reinstate a form of ideological thinking that now seemed all too unnecessary and disruptive. Bell insisted that intellectuals should leave behind their "naïve and simplistic" utopianism for the mature acceptance for the complexities of modern politics. "Naïveté" and "maturity" were the chief rhetorical tropes through which Bell's generation rejected radical politics and explained their rapprochement with American capitalism. The end of ideology meant the end of the politics of the "crowd" and their irrational excesses and Messianic visions.

The apprehension of the "crowd" prevalent in both nineteenth-century liberal and conservative commentaries reappeared in Bell within the context of the Holocaust, totalitarianism, and anti-Semitism. Bell's own anxieties about the "fear of mass action" and "passions let loose" (Liebowitz, 1985, p. 70) were evident in his formulations. For a new generation of American Jewish intellectuals, the actions of the masses could no longer be allied unproblematically to "democratization" and socialism. Nor could science and technology alone lead to personal mastery and some future progressive utopia. This concern moved Bell and a great many of his intellectual generation to confront the bleak existential position of the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1941), who in his Christian insistence on "original sin" criticized Western society for its failure to constrain the human desire to dominate others, its "will to power." In order to contain the dark undergrowth of modern irrationalism, Bell repeatedly returned to a discussion of the kinds of limits that needed to be imposed on human behavior, limits that he believed could be drawn from moral universals whose basis was religion, and from rational scientific discourses that were part of the Western Enlightenment tradition of optimistic rationalism. That the two were often at loggerheads is something that Bell recognized, but he was torn between them. One can characterize Bell as someone who likes to venture into the rational and the Enlightenment by day and return to the security of universal morality and religion by night. He believes in reason, but not overmuch, and he believes in moral universals, but he knows that they have little influence on extremists. These are some of the recurring ideas in Bell's conceptual apparatus, the fulcrum of his social and cultural theory, and as we shall see, the source of many of his own insurmountable contradictions. More consequentially, however, these are the ideas of someone who in later years was distressed about the unraveling of the American liberal hegemony and looked for more assertive resolutions to shore up its power.

THE CRISIS OF LIBERALISM AND CHANGES IN NATIONAL CULTURE

Shortly after the publication of Bell's The End of Ideology, the portrait of liberal pluralist America as a consensual society was undone. Those who felt most excluded by American society—women, African-Americans, ethnic minorities, Native Americans, gays and lesbians, students, and the young—began to be heard as never before. The new social movements and their insurgent voices—intense, passionate in their ideas about equality, identity, and so-

16. Mills's chapter on "The Mass Society" in The Power Elite furnishes a provocative analysis of the trivialization of modern politics by the mass media. His distinction between democratic public and mass society anticipates many of Jürgen Habermas's later arguments outlined in his Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1964/1991). Mills may have overstressed the passivity of the audience but he provided an essential "ideal type model" for understanding the transformation from an engaged democratic public to politics as passive entertainment. There continued to be a sense, however, that citizens could once again be engaged in a meaningful way with the public sphere.
cial justice, and demanding of entitlements and civil rights long denied—emerged to challenge established beliefs, transform the politics and culture of the 1960s and 1970s, and alter the American psyche. At the same time, many young people began to grow wary of the administrative and technological imperatives governing social life and embraced efforts to live life differently from the "lonely crowd" and the "organization man" by creating alternative lifestyles that were more communal and, they hoped, more liberating.

The Vietnam War, the rise of Black militancy and race riots, decaying inner cities, campus unrest, and increasing crime together created what social critic Jürgen Habermas (1966/1975) called a "legitimation crisis" for liberalism. Bell's reigning liberal culture was now being openly challenged by a "counterculture" that sought to expose racism, militarism, and the conformist interests implicit in consumption, education, and leisure. The fixed moral and political standpoint from which Bell had written his early social analysis was shifting under his feet, and he openly criticized the New Left and student radicalism at his own school, Columbia, for contributing to the crisis (1968).

Moreover, Bell was chary of any ambitious large scale social planning, and in 1966 he and Irving Kristol founded The Public Interest, a journal that was generally skeptical of the overly grand social policies of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, and particularly critical of affirmative action. By the 1970s, Irving Kristol had become a Republican, which created a political rift between him and Bell. The two ceased to function as coeditors of The Public Interest, and Nathan Glazer took over in Bell's position. Bell held to the political center by fashioning a contradictory blend of ideas stressing economic equality and bedrock cultural conservatism.

As social conflict intensified in the United States, many of the intellectuals associated with liberal viewpoints were drawn in more politically conservative directions. The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism in 1976 embodied Bell's response to the new challenges to liberal consensus and, like The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society, it was a work of sociological prophecy tied to narratives of delegitimation that anxiously proclaimed new historical rupture, this time between culture and the economy. The book was written at a moment of intense ferment in technologies, lifestyles, and politics, and its temper is one of chastening despair about the failure of the American bourgeoisie to create a "new religion or value system to replace the old [Protestant ethic]" (1976/1996a, p. 75). Culture became the root of much of the crisis of American liberalism. American culture, claimed Bell, was pushed to the breaking point through its own inclusiveness and its inability to set limits. In addition, Bell forecasted that the increasing complexity of post-industrial society would lead to greater government commitment to redressing social inequalities, and this would spur new movements for greater entitlements. A revolution of rising entitlements would occur if the citizen's sense of rights was not met by the government.

During this period Bell emerged as an important liberal figure who shaped many aspects of the discourse of neoconservatism. His became an important voice in the 1980s and 1990s—though by no means the most shrill—in the raging kulturkampf among American intellectual elites that made culture, multiculturalism, affirmative action, and education sites of tremendous contest and debate. Bell continued to be a liberal on political issues but was reborn again, this time as a cultural conservative, and his celebrated self-description, "socialist in economics, liberal in politics, and conservative in culture," inspired the defection of many liberal intellectuals to neoconservatism.

Bell's cultural philosophy reenacted, in slightly updated dress, Matthew Arnold's scenario (1869/1960) that the aim of culture and education is to produce edifying "common values" of taste and judgment that repel the anarchy of the age. At this time Bell was even more
insistent than before that religion should supply generalizable interests for bourgeois culture. Culture should provide, wrote Bell, “universal coherent answers” to “core existential questions: ... how to meet death, the meaning of tragedy, the nature of obligation, the character of love” (1980, p. 333). Throughout the centuries, religion had codified such knowledge. The problem with contemporary culture was not so much that the restraints had gone slack, but that it could no longer offer those coherent narratives that give purpose and meaning to life. Hollywood and television, Bell continued, had created a “national popular culture that is shared by all, but its deeper common value is individual hedonism.” There is, he added, “no common purpose or common faith, only bewilderment” (1980a, p. 260). Bell’s vision of America regenerated through religion, filled with biblical imagery of death, rebirth and redemption, was a reconstituted narrative, and as with his previous combative Cold War rhetoric, there was a great deal of oversimplification. French sociologist Alain Touraine, perhaps said it best and most succinctly when he pointed out that The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism was the work of a moralist written at a time when American hegemony was being “questioned and threatened” (1977, p. 471) and should be read as an ideological text that defends narrow and specific social interests.

FROM LIBERTY TO LIBERATION: POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIAL CHARACTER AND POSTMODERN DISCOURSE

Though The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism is not generally compared with Riesman’s The Lonely Crowd, the two texts share a general interest in Freud and the ways in which social character adapts to new social arrangements. But whereas Riesman’s Freud was tempered and modified by aspects of Harry Stack Sullivan’s emphasis on social psychology and Fromm’s utopian socialism, which defined “truth, justice, freedom,” as “genuine human strivings” (1941/1969, p. 322) arising from the individual social relatedness towards the world, Bell’s Freud was more akin to Phillip Rief’s characterization, a severe bourgeois moralizer fearful of inherent human weaknesses and instinctual drives. Although Freud was willing to challenge and criticize the illusions of religion, Bell was not as eager. In response to a Marxist totalizing conception of society in which the economy is given a determining authority, Bell countered with a trinitarian model where culture, polity, and the economy represent three autonomous yet interrelated spheres of influence. This approach allowed Bell’s economic and technological optimism to coexist with his cultural pessimism. It enabled him to affirm modernity in positive economic and technological terms while mostly disavowing culture’s influence on technology and the economy (Abrahams, 1977; Hefferman, 1995). Bell has largely understood the sphere of culture through Niebuhr’s narratives of “original sin” and Freud’s pessimistic view of inborn irrationality. But culture is more than the moralizing values needed to curtail and limit human drives. Many culturally oriented critics have argued that culture is a pervasive and irreducible force (Sahlins, 1976), one that defines all meaning production including morality and how the technological system and the economy is defined, deployed, and used. Neither the economy nor technology can be explained as somehow neutral or even remotely autonomous from culture’s ubiquitous sway.

The tensions between the moralizing and the modernizing drives where, in Marx’s poetic phrase, “all that is solid melts into the air,” are intrinsic to The Cultural Contradictions of

17. Although Philip Rief’s Freud: The Mind of the Moralist (1959) is not quoted in The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism, Bell’s Freudianism is tied deeply to this conservative intellectual tradition.
Capitalism. The book examined various trends in American society and treated them as ominous "social forecasts," a rather curious critical category that gave Bell’s narrative not merely the force of prophecy but the weight of scientific realism. Bell bemoaned the passing of an internalized morality and in hectoring tones lashed out against a culture that no longer had a moral center and as a consequence had become lost and bewildered. There was a disjunction, Bell claimed, between work and play, production and consumption, that reflected an "extraordinary historical change in human society" (1976’1996a, p. 75).

At least three main forces were identified in this social transformation: the rising influence of the mass media, which exposed people to the wider world of choice and gave them a sense of expanding possibilities; mass consumption, which historically had been linked directly with the idea of "personal transformation" (1976’1996a, p. 66) and opening the self to new experiences and lifestyles; and, finally, the influence of the "cultural mass" (p. 20). Bell’s term for the millions of people who "transmitted" cultural ideas and worked in television, film, advertising, museums, theater, universities, publishing houses, the communications industry, and advertising. The cultural mass was especially important, as this broad group was primarily responsible for the institutionalization of the rebellious impulses of modernism into culture.

For many of the radical-intellectuals-turned-chastened-liberals in the 1950s, the oppositional impulses of modernism acted as a positive force against totalitarianism; Hitler and Stalin had, after all, suppressed modernism as degenerate and subversive. This made it compelling to the American liberal imagination but only if, as the doyen critic of liberal modernism Lionel Trilling (1950/1964) suggested, this transgressive force was kept in check. But more recently, argued Bell, the "cultural mass" had relinquished their role as guardians of culture and there followed the incorporation of the transgressive tendency of modernism into the commercial apparatus of mass consumption. Much of contemporary popular culture, claimed Bell, had been injected with an antibourgeois value system typified by an attraction for rebellion and the antitransformationist, a tendency which led to the triumph of culture over the economy and a conflict between the role requirements of the technical-economic order—delayed gratification, enterprise, self-denial—and the pursuit of personal freedoms as an end in itself. What had almost happened, wrote Bell, "is the elimination of the idea of shame and the reduction of the idea of guilt, as regulators of moral conduct. The shift is characterized by a movement from liberty—the political idea of being free of constraints to personal and social mobility—to liberation, a psychological impulse to be free of all constraints" (1980, p. 231).

Bell’s powerful indiction assumed the near victory of the forces of narcissism and "liberation,” and simplified other matters, especially corporate capitalism’s own ability to co-opt and absorb many of the trends discussed by Bell. It is highly questionable that there was slackening in the work ethic as society had allegedly grown more narcissistic and the workplace more liberated. The workplace may have a more “dressed down” look than the one familiar to William Whyte Jr.’s 1950s “organization man” but the “discontents of work” (Bell, 1956), to use Bell’s earlier phrase, based on specialization, fragmentation, and routine, persist and continue to take a toll on workers’ lives. As some critics have further suggested, the intense competition that workers experience in their jobs seems to thrive rather than diminish under a permissive consumerist regime. Even when the workplace is transformed to include recre-

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18. Much of what Bell had to say in The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism was echoed in Irving Kristol’s pointedly reconservative tract Two Cheers for Capitalism (1978). Capitalism delivers on the basic promise of improving people’s material standards of living, hence, it should be cheered—but one cheer less than the conventional three, because capitalism can subvert the cultural values on which a free society depends.
ational moments—as in many jobs involving the manipulations of symbols and information, such as advertising and the high-tech industries—these “liberating” strategies are placed under the service of the managerial values of personal efficiency whose ultimate aim is to increase productivity (see Perlestein, 1996; Frank, 1997). More to the point, given the current American economy, and its new emphasis on short-term work, downsizing, and the flexible corporation, which commands little trust or loyalty from its workers, the dominant move may be toward a new character structure that requires, as Richard Scannell has argued in his small but perceptive book The Corrosion of Character (1998), “a pliant sell,” one very much attuned to the unstable and insecure nature of work, and which must be “open to new experiences” (p. 133) as a matter of economic survival. Nor is it likely that popular culture undermines the legitimating basis of the industrial order. Popular culture is, as cultural studies theorists like to say, a “contested terrain” where different value systems struggle for dominance. Though popular culture may encourage triviality and hedonism, it is not the vast sty of vices that Bell and many cultural conservatives proclaim it is. More often than not, popular culture celebrates religious, nationalistic, pro-family, and market-oriented values. The ideological climate of late capitalist society simply does not lend itself easily to its own subversion, as Bell has self-confidently suggested. Yet because culture plays such an essential role in his story he is sharply on the lookout for its disruptive influences. He finds them aplenty not only in popular culture, but also in what he believes to be the morally corrosive mood of postmodern philosophy.

In the revised version of The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism, Bell released a stinging attack against postmodernist theorists such as Michel Foucault (1966/1973) and Jacques Derrida (1989) who criticized Western knowledge, subjectivity, and the Enlightenment belief in objective truths, including moral truths.19 His critique is particularly relevant because it revealed an important theoretical distinction, indeed a clash of sensitivities, between older American conceptions of the self as described by Bell, Riesman, and other American sociological critics, and European post-structuralist formulations, which question both the whole notion of a self and the realist narrative of objective knowledge. Classical European philosophy, from Descartes to Kant, supposes an objectively stable ego—a Cartesian cogito or a thinking subject—which is both the basis and source of knowledge. Most of the work of postmodernist theorists disputes this claim and is determined to show that the subject and any other definitions of “the self” are the elaborate constructions, over time, of impersonal, transhistorical forces. For writers like Foucault, what mattered was not the individual self but the impersonal continuous activities he called “discourse.” Discourses, wrote Foucault, construct expedient fictions such as “cogito,” which are in turn relied upon to generate knowledge and truth claims. This kind of thinking, Bell suggested, not only abandons “agency” but is nihilistic and represents a fundamental attack on the Enlightenment conception of knowledge, and upon the whole Western notion of traditional values and morality.

Bell maintained the necessity of a unifying moral authority, for without such an “Archimedean point” there could not be a basis for moral responsibility or a “politics that can set limits to permissible behaviour” (1976/1996a, p. 306). The unity of the subject is for Bell an unassailable fact, but to many postmodernists this unity was always no more than a discursive fiction, an ideological expression of bourgeois social dominance and its modernizing drive to shatter tradition and collective forms of expression into the rational and individual units of

19. Bell's withering critique of postmodernist theorists is part of the afterword published in the 1996 twentieth anniversary edition of The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism. Another version of this argument can be found in Bell's essay "Beyond Modernism. Beyond Self?" (1980).
the capitalist marketplace (Jameson, 1991; Hefferman, 1995). Bell believes in an outside Aesthetician point from which one can assess moral limits and raise cultural and moral standards, but to postmodernists there is no transcendent outside since all moral positions are linguisitic constructions situated in specific class and historical contexts. There is little possibility of describing and evaluating moral issues in a language that all reasonable observers would accept. Moreover, whereas Bell sees postmodernity as part of a cultural apparatus threatening the rational efficiency of capitalist production, left-oriented critics like Fredric Jameson (1991) and David Harvey (1989) see postmodernity as the ultimate triumph of a capitalism that has colonized all aspects of everyday life, transformed it into a game of consumption, and subjected social actors to an intense experience of spatial and temporal fragmentation.

Bell belongs to what cultural critic Christopher Lasch called, "the party of the superego" (1984, p. 200). Unlike many political neoconservatives who urge the use of the repressive mechanisms of the state to enforce moral conformity, such as anti-pornography laws or the death penalty, Bell argues for a deeply etched morality that does not need to rely on rewards or fear of punishment. The error of the 1960s generation was its violation of the human need for limits, for without such limits there is political chaos and narcissism. As did Lasch, Bell condemns America for its obsession with therapeutic self-absorption and roundly uses psychoanalytic insights to buttress his own argument for the rebirth of moral discipline. He has no quarrel with patriarchal culture, only its lack of power. Bell’s America belongs to a rational imaginary where the country is a model of democracy and freedom but its position of moral leadership in the Western world is sadly eroded. Religion, moral ideals, and high-minded imagery about the rational character are central to his political liberalism (Bell, 1980) and his exhortation of American exceptionalism (Lipset, 1990; Bell, 1980).

It is tempting, and I think quite appropriate, to think that what Bell calls The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism are in a sense the intellectual contradictions of Daniel Bell. These disjunctive tensions are inherent in the conceptual traditions within which he worked; his liberal ameliorative faith in reform, technology, and progress; and his despairing suspicion that the greater public is unwilling or incapable of defining either political or ethical limits without an ingrained moral apparatus. Bell is too well-versed in Weber’s critique of rationality to naively assume that instrumental reason and the scientific approach to planning can produce a way of measuring social values. Values are a matter of culture, but paradoxically, culture is now abandonning values.

**Toward a New “Common Good”: Communitarianism and National Liberalism**

Bell’s emphasis on the re-moralization of society places him squarely in the neoconservative camp. Against the predominant emphasis of modern liberalism and left-wing rad-

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20. Conservatives, along with some liberals, tend to believe that revitalizing civil society means “remoralizing” it with an authoritative moral code that brings back individual responsibility, trust, and civic virtue is order to combat the re-situation and pluralization of values; this is a theme that social historian Gertrude Himmelfarb (1994, 1995) advances with much success. Himmelfarb, along with husband Irving Kristol and son Bill Kristol, editor of The Weekly Standard, are part of a core of neoconservatives who equate civil society with remoralization. They are united with American religious conservatives who want a more activist government to support their value-based agenda for American society: criminalization of abortion, government-mandated school prayers, and entertainment media censor-ship. These cultural warriors are often at odds with the neoliberal, free-market libertarians whose main agenda is to get government off the back of the market. Himmelfarb insists that the laissez-faire approach is not an option on moral issues and conservatives are “…obliged, however reluctantly, to invoke the power of the law and the state, if only to protect those private institutions and associations that are the best repositories of traditional values” (1995, p. 248).
calism on the desirability of liberation—from the past, from bourgeois conventions—Bell has stressed the typically conservative theme of the necessity of restraint and constraint. While most contemporary American theorists of culture have followed Clifford Geertz in stressing the aesthetic and symbolic function of culture, Bell, by contrast, has insisted upon the centrality of moral demands in the cultural system. And at a time when American society was moving toward what sociologist Richard Merelman (1984) has called a “loosely bounded culture” that stressed greater individualism and a weakened notion of shared common values, Bell was moving toward a new liberal definition of the “common good.”

Though a self-proclaimed cultural conservative, Bell has also developed a critique of the market that is at odds with contemporary neoliberal “free-market” advocates. By the end of the 1950s, the corporation had established a new legitimacy in American life, and in The End of Ideology Bell championed the American corporation. By the time The Coming of Post-Industrial Society (1973/1999) was written, that legitimacy was being challenged. The convergence of interests between the corporation and the public had been replaced by a sense of incongruence, as corporate America shut down plants in highly unionized cities and moved them to regions where workers were less organized. Bell’s much vaunted “talented” and “meritorious” managerial class of the new knowledge economy were promoting their self-interests in rather shocking ways, and this was later dramatically manifested in the corporate and managerial excesses of the 1990s where CEO pay packages soared, and the Enron, WorldCom, and Anderson Accounting scandals led American capitalism to the verge of a financial and ethical crisis. “One of the most grotesque forms of moral decay in the country,” wrote Bell more recently, “is in the ethics of so many business corporations” (quoted in Dorman, 2000, p. 181).

Bell had not predicted the full range of corporate abuse but he was nonetheless disturbed by the economic rationale: promoting private greed and he speculated on ways to counter it. The problem was Homo Economicus, or the willingness among many nineteenth- and twentieth-century liberals to overemphasize economic self-interest and make market motives the only human motives. If that was indeed the case, there would be no nurses, teachers, poets, farmers, police officers, or professors, and no way of assessing what social groups and societies need. According to Bell, this “economizing model” offers an atomistic view of society and assumes that the sum total of individual decisions is equivalent to a social decision. For Bell, what is called for is a fundamental shift in thinking from this individualistic economizing model to what he described as a sociologizing model that would be sensitive to public and community duty.

The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism discussed the inevitable tensions between self- and public interest, between personal self-realization and community obligation. In this instance, Bell came close to anticipating a new emerging current in liberal discourse—the movement toward a liberal communitarianism whose defining narratives are combatting tendencies towards atomized self-interest on the one hand, and the neocapitalist emphasis on an unimpeded market on the other. As a way to harmonize the private and the public spheres, Bell suggested a “public philosophy of the household” that would create a greater commitment to the social sphere so that something resembling a “liberal society may survive” (p. 251). Here Bell returned to his social democratic roots. Though he was distrustful of the growing role of the state over civil society, he nonetheless defended the function of government to provide public goods, and he counseled the need to expand civic republicanism. It represented a consequential new emphasis in liberal discourse on civic virtues, moderation of needs, limitation of acquisition, and public interest as a primary good rather than a secondary one. Yet as a political strategy, it is deeply compromised by Bell’s cultural conservatism.
Bell’s influence, insofar as such matters can be traced since he is part of a broader and overlapping and contradictory intellectual formation, seems to be most evident in what might be called the antiliberalist left in such works as Christopher Lasch’s *Culture of Narcissism* (1979) and the work of Lasch’s former student, Russell Jacoby (1995). It is reflected also in such publications as *The American Prospect*, edited by, among others, Paul Starr, a leading expert in American health care reform and a former student of Daniel Bell, and in the neoconservative journal *The Weekly Standard*, where the supremacy of the state over civil society is routinely admonished and the call for “moral clarity” often trumpeted. More broadly, it appears in the critique of modern values advanced by a group of liberal communitarian-oriented intellectuals who gravitate towards publications such as the Jewish liberal journal *Tikkun* (Galbo, 1989) and Amrithi Etzioni’s *Communitarian Review*.

The new emphasis on community discourse became increasingly important in the 1980s and 1990s and was articulated in terms of a critique of expressive individualism, and the centrality of civil society as a mediator between the state and the market (see Rose, 1999). Some of these arguments were elaborated by a group of political philosophers, including Alisdair MacIntyre (1984), Michael J. Sandel (1984), Michael Walzer (1983), Charles Taylor (1989), and Daniel A. Bell (1993), who brought public attention to the principles of “common good,” “mutual responsibilities,” and the importance of “the situated self,” while criticizing the prevailing secular rights-based ethics and the romantic view of “personal expression” derived from Rousseau and late-eighteenth-century philosophy. As political philosophers began to speculate about the “common good,” a new generation of sociologists and political scientists issued warnings about a crisis in civil membership (Bellah et al., 1985; Putnam, 2000) and the attenuation of religious values (Meleremos, 1984). They stressed the need for a renewed associational life (Etzioni, 1996), the importance of social capital and trust in economic mobility (Coleman, 1988; Fukuyama, 1996), and the necessity of shoring-up moral obligation (Wolfe, 1989).

Though there is much in Bell’s philosophy of the public household that overlaps with communitarian interests, Bell has not identified himself as a “communitarian.” In a review called “The Cultural Wars: American Intellectual Life, 1965–1992,” Bell, perhaps uncharitably, charges that the leading exponent of communitarianism, Amitai Etzioni, was simply “popularizing” (1992, p. 14) ideas that had been around in the academy, some of them his own. What does unlike Bell to “communitarian” ideas is the importance of community for personal identity and moral thinking, and the claim that “expressive individualism” is a disturbing and undermining development in contemporary culture. The new liberal communitarian discourse seeks to find a middle ground between individual rights and social responsibilities, while looking to promote a pluralism that has at its core a sense of shared values. For some critics, however, the core shared values prescribed are too focused on the nation. Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka (2002), in his general critique of communitarianism, describes this new discourse as a variant of “liberal nationalism,” in that the problem of social solidarity is addressed by an appeal to ideals of nationhood as the basis of social good in order to sustain the bonds between the citizen and the state. Other critics point out that there is little in the communitarian argument that shows its concern with “uncovering relations of power and dependency that render individuals resistant—often immune—to calls for moral reawakening” (Lukes, 1998, pp. 87–89).

Daniel Bell’s economic and cultural narratives, as I have argued, shared many of these characteristics. They entailed two distinctive strategies: a nostalgic rhetoric of the decline of a traditional moral authority, and a messianic rhetoric of building new bonds of solidarity through a return to the sacred and by valorizing the exceptional nature of the American na-
tional community. Having discovered that culture is at the heart of the contemporary crisis, Bell, like an earlier Max Nordau or Emile Durkheim, turned to religion and the nation as ways of containing what to his view were the forces that contributed to social weakening. Bell has never satisfactorily addressed the perplexing problem of defining a set of core moral values (whose values?) in a multicultural and multireligious society. He may be too impatient a moralist to have worked out the subtleties and tensions of the cultural system, and too much of an ideologue to be a sensitive moralist. Nevertheless, his emphasis on a new public philosophy, eagerly embraced by neoconservatives, has also served as a goad and a challenge to liberals and left-leaning intellectuals to seriously discuss a nonreactionary public policy that harmonizes the interests of civic responsibility with the liberal concern for individual rights.

CONCLUSION

The movement from The Lonely Crowd to The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism and beyond illustrates, as I have suggested, some discernible thematic variations in the narratives of American liberalism at different historical stages as well as some of the gaps and contradictions inherent in such accounts. Bell and Riesman are significant thinkers whose ideas evolved, so they are difficult to categorize. They travelled in slightly different but overlapping intellectual circles, and each responded to the political challenges of his time with a remarkable intellectual output, so that one is left with a sense of awe about the magnitude of their undertakings and the daring and broad visions of their work. These are two sociologists who took as their tableaux an entire society and, though their work lacks the sensitivity to race, class, and gender issues that more contemporary thinkers have addressed, their intellectual sweep shows both a gift for summation and an eye for the best theoretical scholarship of the time. Both are part of a post-war generation that began to map out the new territory of mass culture and society and draw them in a more favorable light than the previous generation.

The narrative strains and deep ambivalences found in Riesman's The Lonely Crowd may in part be explained by his attempt to reconcile certain aspects of critical theory borrowed from Erich Fromm with the American liberal consensus of the post-war period. The autonomous character represented for Riesman a real potential alternative to both moral intransigence and indifference. His analysis of the social and political setting of post-war America suggested mixed tendencies: an encouragement of the expansion of self-expression through leisure and the mass media, and a withering of political convictions. Riesman presented an equivocal portrait of modern society and social character and offered no grand resolutions to the ambiguities he found, while at the same time he repeated some of the pieties of liberal discourse.

While Riesman was circumspect, Bell was the ultimate public intellectual as “inside-dopester,” and an uncompromising moralist. His writings were based chiefly on the expression of convictions. Bell’s early narratives privileged the liberal confidence of “realism” against the so-called ideological passions of political radicalism, while his later ones were intellectual defenses of American hegemony in crisis. In these later texts, one chief pattern emerged: Bell’s economic optimism and cultural pessimism jar against each other in ever increasing tension. The extraordinary technological and economic vitality of capitalism occurs alongside social dislocation and ethical drift, the source of which is a culture that has abandoned any sense of limits. As the liberal hegemony of the 1950s crumbled, Bell articulated a new narrative resolution to the crisis of liberalism, the philosophy of the public household. The new discourse attempted to curb the growing power of the state over civil society, stressed civic responsibility to the nation, and offered religion as the basis for community solidarity.
As with many current communitarian narratives, Bell’s was intended to shore up the power of a country whose exceptional experience was believed to be coming to an end. Bell’s conservative cultural narratives gave intellectual shape to deep feelings of anxiety; they sounded the alarm that the postmodern barbarians were at the gate, lamented the collapse of the liberal cultural mandarins, and fulminated against both a community that had abandoned civic responsibility, and individuals who had lost a sense of the limits of self-expression.

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