

Introduction

“A City upon a Hill”

We now have just cause to destroy [the Indians] by all means possible.
John Smith, 1622

The West has been a constructive force of the highest significance in our life.
Frederick Jackson Turner, 1896

“We shall be as a city upon a hill,” Puritan leader John Winthrop told his fellow voyagers aboard the *Arbella* in 1630 as they were preparing to land on the Massachusetts shore. Winthrop and the other Puritan saints believed that the civilized, or European, world was holding its collective breath to see whether their godly venture would succeed. What is noteworthy is that Winthrop did not concoct his prediction out of nothing. Europeans had for years persuaded themselves that the Americas truly might be a special, if not utopian, place.¹ Although experience altered that exotic perception of the New World, the conviction that the land across the Atlantic Ocean was a promising locale for exploration and development never really disappeared.

Winthrop’s words would later come to be seen, particularly during the twentieth century, as a declaration of exceptionalism that set England’s American colonies apart from the old European world. As historian Jack P. Greene observes, “The concept of American exceptionalism with its positive connotations was present at the very creation of America.”² In America, there would be freedom from the culture of corruption and from tyranny endemic to the English political system and religious establishment. Were their efforts at achieving reform through flight to be successful, the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay imagined themselves as offering hope to like-minded people.

¹ Jack P. Greene, *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity from 1492 to 1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 8–33.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

2 *National Security and Core Values in American History*

Power in Massachusetts Bay was exercised in the pursuit of specific political and religious objectives. Within a decade of the arrival of the colonists, expansion south and west became common practice under the supervision of the General Court. The ruling bodies of new towns, some of which would soon form the colony of Connecticut, strictly controlled public affairs. Government in New England was oligarchic, yet democratic – but only for those freemen who embraced Puritanism in its different forms. To sustain the commonwealth in its mission, a local and oceanic commerce rapidly developed. In a theme that serves as a prelude to the heart of this study, landed expansion and commercial growth became crucial guardians of the basic values for which the Puritans stood, thereby anticipating to an extent one aspect of the frontier thesis of the influential historian, Frederick Jackson Turner. “The West has been a constructive force of the highest significance in our life,” Turner wrote for the *Atlantic Monthly* in his 1896 essay, “The Problem of the West.” The fundamental task for people living on the frontier, he asserted, had been that of “conserving and developing what was original and valuable in this new country.”³

Colonization outside of New England failed to create settlements that were as emblematic of future assumptions about American identity and character as those emerging from the Massachusetts Bay experience. If citizens and scholars have mainly dwelled on the endeavors of the Puritans, it is because religious overtones contained in the cultural fabric of the nation reflect a sense of providential chosenness that many Americans embrace.⁴ The Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, which became New York in 1664 after being seized by English forces, and the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania, for all their potential as hubs of commerce and western expansion, never found a place in the public memory as progenitors of national character or a divinely inspired mission. And however central Jamestown and the growth of Virginia were to American history, the advent of slavery in 1619 limited the role Virginia would play in producing the belief that America should serve as a model for people seeking freedom from oppression. The irony is that freedom in considerable measure owes the promise it has long extended to many others to the nation’s wrenching experience with enslaved labor.⁵

Although it is tempting to read the future into the past, doing so has the potential to rob history of its contingency. The uniqueness of the Puritan experiment argues against the inevitability of Massachusetts Bay making common cause with England’s other North American colonies. Separatists

³ Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Problem of the West,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, September, 1896, pp. 289–97; quoted words, 289, 292.

⁴ On the central place of providential chosenness in American history, see Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

⁵ Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975).

Introduction: “A City upon a Hill”

3

were unflinchingly expelled from the Bay colony. And the Navigation Acts of the 1650s and 1660s – contemporaneous with England’s civil wars and the Stuart Restoration – could not drive the colonies together, even though those acts curtailed the commercial freedom of action of colonies in the Chesapeake region and the West Indies, a lesson not lost on other, less affected colonies. Nevertheless, the rise of English mercantilism was a manifest success for homeland and colonies alike, with the result that the bonds of empire were greatly, if briefly, enhanced – at least in economic terms.⁶ And yet, this development did not lead settlers soon to identify more closely with each other, let alone strengthen the real and sentimental ties with their home country.⁷

It took the imposition of what colonists denounced as arbitrary imperial rule, carried out under the authority given by James II to Edmund Andros and the Dominion of New England in 1685, to initiate the process by which some of them perceived important commonalities in their individual experiences. Americans also believed that their country did beckon others, as evidenced by the numbers of Europeans who reached America’s shores throughout the eighteenth century, and especially after the French and Indian War.⁸ A shared sense of history became all the more apparent in the decade immediately before the Revolution when Parliament used its power – as seen, for example in the Proclamation of 1763, the Sugar Act of 1764, the Stamp Act of 1765, the Townshend Act of 1767, and the Tea Act of 1773 – to limit colonial expansion and reassert London’s economic supremacy. These developments led many Americans to rethink their identity as British subjects and increasingly to defend existing patterns of self-government, which in turn strengthened the rationale for independence.

The growth of a common identity occurred in another, less edifying and indirect way, one that foreshadowed the limits of American distinctiveness. Well into the seventeenth century, colonies protected the privileges of the founders and those who exercised political and economic power. By and large, oligarchy remained the political order of the day, yet there was usually room in the political process for those who acquired large tracts of land. The privileged also constructed legal walls to safeguard their status against challenges from disaffected, less advantaged colonists.

In the first fifty years or so after settlement, the prospects for democratic politics were at best nominal in English North America. Puritan Massachusetts and its New England offspring were only the most visible in how they sought to remain true to their original mission. The Half-Way

⁶ Alan Taylor, *American Colonies* (New York: Viking, 2001), 257–9.

⁷ Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Background of the American Revolution*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), 5–9.

⁸ Bernard Bailyn with the assistance of Barbara DeWolfe, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986).

4 *National Security and Core Values in American History*

Covenant, begun in the 1660s, was the first indication that the Puritans could not hold back the tides of religious and, ultimately, political change.⁹ Settlers in the Roman Catholic proprietary colony of Maryland, for their part, had to turn a profit not for the King of England, as was the case in royal colonies, but for the Calvert family. The efforts of the Calverts to reproduce a semi-feudal, manorial system in their vast realms failed. The growing attractiveness of Maryland to largely Protestant settlers, especially from Virginia, helped bring into being a colony in which political and legal structures were heavily biased in favor of the Calverts and their wealthy friends. The volatility of politics in Maryland by the mid-1600s, however, showed the reach of privilege to be long, though not absolute.¹⁰

The colonists of Virginia, originally a charter colony, owed their fealty to the English Crown after a disastrous encounter with native people in the early 1620s. Thereafter a royal colony, Virginia remained a contentious place dominated by the governor, his council, and the county courts. Abundant land seemed there for the taking, thereby enhancing the status of the privileged classes. At the same time, labor remained in short supply – an unhappy fact with two momentous consequences. Black slavery developed, albeit gradually, almost as a matter of course in Virginia and then spread throughout the Chesapeake and southern colonies. In addition, fierce disputes over land led to conflicts within Virginia, the most famous being Bacon's Rebellion, which in 1676 degenerated into a bloody civil war. Poor aspiring landowners on the colony's frontier, a number of whom had formerly been indentured servants, rejected Governor Sir William Berkeley's conservative land policies and domination of the Indian trade. Around the same time, well-connected tobacco planters claimed tracts of fertile land, leaving small or poor farmers with the prospect of becoming tenants. Nathaniel Bacon, himself a wealthy planter who coveted Indian land on the colony's frontier, promised freedom and arable land to those who fought with him against the governor and his allies. After a brief success, including Bacon's seizure of power and Berkeley's exile, England crushed the rebellion. Modest reductions in tax rates and increased access to land ensued. Virginia politics nevertheless remained foremost in service to the interests of the colony's aristocrats.¹¹

In justifying their hold on power and privileged status before the Glorious Revolution of 1688, colonial elites anticipated how subsequent leaders would act to protect their understanding of American identity. They isolated suspected dissenters and branded them as radicals unworthy of the benefits of citizenship; they also restricted access to political power by extending patronage to their friends. And, importantly, elites depended on

⁹ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 180–1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 136–7, 140.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 125–31, 139–40, 149–51.

Introduction: “A City upon a Hill”

5

free or low-paid laborers – at least 150,000 indentured servants reached England’s mainland colonies in the course of the seventeenth century – to build the very society that excluded them or lessened their opportunity for mobility.¹² Regeneration of privilege by social custom or political marginalization became common. If that tactic did not succeed, the powerful could fall back on the use of force against those who challenged their elevated status.

Paradoxically, the self-referential belief that America could serve as a beacon for oppressed peoples – “a shining city” as President Ronald Reagan put it – strengthened over time. It became a fundamental part of national identity in the twentieth century when, contrary to its tradition of disengagement from foreign political affairs, the United States became the world’s greatest power. The relative absence of formal involvement in world politics until December 1941, excepting President Woodrow Wilson’s quixotic diplomacy at the Versailles Peace Conference of 1919, did not prevent the United States from becoming supreme in global finance and dominant in international trade during the Great War. That era’s incipient internationalism would be transformed into a thoroughgoing globalism on the eve of American entry into World War II.

How had so great a transformation come about? What effect did it have on that greatest of American traditions, freedom? By the twentieth century, freedom, which had been commonly referred to as liberty early in American history, symbolized what American citizens revered most. Core values, which were first given explicit expression in the Declaration of Independence and subsequently the Constitution and Bill of Rights, were more than abstract ideas. They were tangible principles about republican governance that, protected by the rule of law, offered the prospect of a common identity to all citizens, even if that identity was not truly democratic. These principles, as they emerged and evolved over time, encompassed what individual Americans deemed to be their inherent rights, including, and essential for present purposes, freedom of speech and assembly; freedom of the press; right to trial by a jury of one’s peers; protection from unreasonable search and seizure, which essentially became synonymous with a right to privacy; and freedom from self-incrimination. Moreover, many citizens who were not among the ruling elite understood core values as guiding precepts that bolstered their abiding faith in democracy, however limited it actually was. It was in this sense that the popular classes shared with the privileged a preference for limited government; that is, one held in check by distinct separation of powers among three branches of government. The presumption of a common heritage turned the beacon of liberty into a powerful symbol, confirming for Americans the exceptional nature of their national

¹² Bernard Bailyn, *The Peopling of British North America: An Introduction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 60–1.

6 *National Security and Core Values in American History*

experience. With some trepidation, the founding generation left to its successors the daunting task of sustaining the nation's devotion to republican principles. If the very idea of America suggested the existence of a distinctive character, that quality needed constant care and nurturing to safeguard it in an arguably hostile world. By the late nineteenth century, Americans who imagined their country in a prominent position on the world stage thought about the protection of liberty in tandem with the pursuit of security. The United States therefore selectively promoted abroad as part of its foreign policy these core values: the right of some to self-determination, the universal appeal of democracy, and the ideal of human rights. Did efforts to export core values enhance the nation's security? Critics thought not, charging especially after 1945 that values lost their salience when put in the service of grand strategy.

Providing for security had long entailed risks. John Winthrop's initial plans for the establishment of an exemplary colony never envisioned Massachusetts Bay as the harbinger of an idyllic utopia. His fabled city would metaphorically rest on a hill for good reason; it was from the vantage point of height that the Puritan community would be kept safe from its adversaries. To build a strong city upon a hill was therefore sound defensive strategy in that era of European colonization, which settlers in New England doubtless knew.¹³ Winthrop's words embodied hopes and fears found throughout early America, even though how security would be achieved differed from colony to colony.

A common understanding of what constituted danger made freedom seem all the more uncertain almost from the first years of settlement. English colonists responded to the non-Europeans in their environs as a matter necessitating self-defense against those whom they were displacing. In viewing Indians as enemies, colonists developed a sense of entitlement about deciding whether others should live or perhaps perish because their mere presence threatened the work of the new settlers. Employing preemptive action, they also began to justify their treatment of native people as a means of forestalling the dire consequences that might accompany delay in acting decisively. Preemption, whether by legal means when possible or by military means when deemed necessary, assisted the development of colonial identity and contributed to the quest for security.¹⁴

Indians did not conceive of land as private property, nor did the exchange of goods make them proto-capitalists. Colonists abhorred these and other

¹³ See, for example, John Childs, "The Military Revolution, I: The Transition to Modern Warfare," in Charles Townshend, ed., *The Oxford History of Modern Warfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 20–39.

¹⁴ The French also had the occasion to employ force when, for example, relations with the Natchez Indians in the lower Mississippi region turned violent; Robert Bothwell, *The Penguin History of Canada* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2006), 72–3.

Introduction: “A City upon a Hill”

7

presumed cultural deficiencies and distrusted the people whose lands they were seizing. The case of Powhatan, the most powerful chief in the Virginia region, and its aftermath is instructive. Powhatan tried to establish and maintain cordial trading relations with the English people. Pushed to the limit almost from the moment of Jamestown’s founding, Powhatan’s allies pushed back. The rapaciousness for arable land of a people in thrall to the tobacco plant meant trouble. With no middle ground separating the two sides, bloody conflict ensued in Virginia. Provocation followed on provocation until March 1622 when almost one-third of the colonists perished in an attack. John Smith, then in England, welcomed the slaughter: “We now have just cause to destroy [the Indians] by all means possible.” Warfare continued intermittently and, with the help of diseases against which Indians were not immune, gradually reduced their numbers in Virginia from 24,000 in 1607 to about 2,000 sixty years later. Survivors who remained in the environs of the colony were regarded as threats to security. Colonial law in fact allowed landholders to shoot Indians who were found trespassing on their lands, an action that might be characterized as a kind of preemptive self-defense.¹⁵

Early white-Indian interactions were scarcely better in New England. William Bradford, soon to become governor of Plymouth Colony, imagined the new land to be “a hideous and desolate wilderness full of wild beasts and wild men.” After settlement, he found confirmation for his views: Indians killed the livestock of settlers because their pigs and cattle ranged widely, thus destroying Indian customs of land usage. To limited effect, colonists endeavored to use legal instruments, deeds, to turn Indian land into private property. By the 1630s, the killing of livestock led to attempts to bring Indians to justice in Massachusetts for violating the property rights of white settlers. Justice remained elusive because fines levied for the offenses financed further expansion into native lands.

Tensions rose in southeastern Connecticut between settlers and the Pequot, who refused to pay tribute or submit to the white legal system. Aided by rivals of the Pequot, the English launched an attack in May 1637, killing some four hundred natives. Military and settlement leaders alike praised their God for blessing this effort. Four decades later in 1675, the Puritans provoked a confrontation with the Wampanoag Metacom, or King Philip as he was known, that lasted into the spring of 1676 when Indian resistance began to collapse. Survivors, especially chiefs, were executed and others were sold into slavery. An explanation for this brutality should focus, first, on fears the colonists had long held about the nonwhite people in the colonies and, second, on the unforeseen appeal of Indian culture in the structured Puritan world. In the words of Reverend Increase Mather, “Christians in this Land have become too like unto the Indians.” Were that condition to

¹⁵ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 125, 131–6; quoted words, 135.

spread, the political, religious, and economic rationales behind settlement and expansion would be jeopardized.¹⁶

Fear therefore became closely linked to the quest for freedom in early American history. To a considerable extent, the fears that European settlers experienced in their new environment were self-generated, the result of restrictive ideas about governance, the law, economic pursuits, and the Indians so close at hand. Despite its original contingency, this legacy of fear accompanying freedom in the colonial era would recur – particularly when Americans debated the need for a dynamic security policy after 1890. In the process, it became hard to distinguish between fear and nonclinical paranoia. Furthermore, a kind of apprehension has influenced the writing of history about national security. Historians are hardly immune from adopting as their own the assumptions and biases held by the individuals about whom they write. However purposeful or inadvertent that development, it is difficult to resist when thinking about the defense of cherished core values. It does not necessarily make for good history.

Three factors provide a framework for explaining the problematic nexus between basic rights and values and security policy: political economy, military power, and fear. The readiness to use preemptive force in the name of safety, whether perceived threats are imminent or not, from the earliest years of settlement and the role of fear in initiating the resort to armed force have already been addressed. Yet, there is much more to the matter of fear than its relationship to force. Fear often mobilizes people to give their support to policies of dubious provenance, such as global containment as we see later in the book, and can prevent the dispassionate assessment of presumed threats to the nation's security. The issue of political economy, particularly in regard to the structural demands of an expansive, marketplace capitalism and a reflexive attachment to foreign trade by elites and the general public, is addressed more fully in due course. Suffice it to note here that Americans typically have intimately linked commerce and freedom.

This introduction has presented a brief look not only at the origins of American exceptionalism but also at the disconcerting ways in which that distinctiveness was nurtured during the seventeenth century. Four parts comprise the remainder of the book. The first traces the origins of the security ethos, as set forth in the preface. Chapter 1, beginning after the Glorious Revolution, surveys the emergence of core values and examines how patterns of trade and continental expansion sustained those values and the Founders' commitment to republican virtue during the first century of nationhood. Regenerating the republican ideal was never an easy task. Republicanism had exclusionary aspects that the popular classes challenged with limited success throughout the 1800s. Chapter 2 revisits debates over expansion and empire in the 1890s, which lasted until about 1920, by which time a

¹⁶ Ibid., 188–203; quoted words, 188, 202.

Introduction: “A City upon a Hill”

9

proto-national security state had taken shape. By the end of World War I, the meaning of liberty had become unclear because the boundaries of individual rights, such as freedom of speech and assembly, had perceptibly narrowed from what they had been when those debates began. And, Woodrow Wilson’s promise of self-determination as a consequence of war unwittingly invited discussions within America about who benefited most from the values extolled in a republic. That is, why did not basic freedoms and the right to self-determination apply equally to African Americans, to offer only the most obvious example?

Next, Part II surveys Wilsonian internationalism and its transformation into global containment. Chapter 3 considers whether Republican foreign policy during the 1920s and early years of the Great Depression protected core values from what numerous Americans believed was the contagion of internationalism. Chapter 4, which covers the 1930s and 1940s, assesses Franklin D. Roosevelt’s persistent struggle to maintain his internationalist impulse amid waves of economic nationalism, the allure of isolationism, and a revival of militarism abroad. He linked America’s future to global engagement without asking how that course of action might affect the nation’s values. For Roosevelt, this humanistic globalism was the only viable option for the United States. The onset of the Cold War, followed by the establishment of a formal national security state during the Truman presidency, brought the integrity of founding principles into question. Chapter 5 scrutinizes the period from 1950 through 1973 – the era of Richard Nixon – and reveals an increasing incompatibility between U.S. security policy and core values like freedom of speech and assembly and also the longing for self-determination by postcolonial and oppressed peoples around the world.

Part III analyzes the age of strategic globalism, the years from 1973 to 2001, in which limits on the deployment of American power stand out as a defining characteristic. Chapter 6 examines the years encompassing Nixonian détente and the Reagan presidency and portrays them as a time in which the pursuit of presumed national interests markedly circumscribed the role of core values in deliberations over security policy. Of special importance in that respect is the intrusion of human rights considerations into the policy process. Chapters 7 and 8 then contend that American exceptionalism and the principles on which it had historically been based declined appreciably by the end of the Cold War and during the presidencies of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. What emerged along with globalization after the Soviet Union faded from the scene were a new militarism and a pronounced unilateralism in the conduct of foreign policy.

Finally, Part IV examines the adverse influence of the Bush Doctrine on core values. Chapter 9 assesses the damage done to values in the name of security by George W. Bush. It also evaluates how the war on terror in the Persian Gulf region and beyond begat not only a remarkable accretion of presidential powers but also a palpable rejection of the rule of law by the

executive branch. The conclusion engages the debate over the relationship between values and national security as carried on by prominent intellectuals. At length, after considering whether the government at the highest levels had fallen into the hands of right-wing authoritarians – a position put forward by John W. Dean, a White House counsel in the Nixon administration – it is no surprise to find that the war on terror in the first decade of the twenty-first century was waged by a government antithetical to individual rights and liberties. Whether there is a way out of this dilemma so as to restore some of the vitality of core values is then considered briefly.

At this juncture, several words are in order about the Second Amendment to the Constitution. The freedom that numerous Americans cherish most, the right to bear arms, looms large in the background of this study. Unlike federal courts, which have traditionally held the Second Amendment to mean a collective right to bear arms, many citizens have argued for the amendment's application as an individual right. By mid-2007, liberal lawyers and constitutional scholars were helping make the case for this broader interpretation, which the Supreme Court essentially accepted in a landmark ruling in June 2008.¹⁷ To a remarkable degree, this development reflects changes in the ways Americans have thought about national security since the end of the Cold War. The paradoxical militarization of security discourse after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, and even more so since 2001, insinuates that advocacy of almost any guise of gun control equates with tyranny and oppression and, hence, must be resisted.

Ultimately, this book is concerned with security and foreign policy. Of necessity, it also constitutes an extended essay about the course of American history. Based on the work of many other scholars and on my own research, it reflects the considerations and reconsiderations of more than three decades of thinking, teaching, and writing about the United States, especially about why and how the nation has engaged the outside world. The costs of that engagement for America's place in the world, and for the rights and liberties of its citizens, have historically been great and will remain so far into the future, as the imbroglio that is the occupation of Iraq unfortunately demonstrates. It is my intent in writing this book to provide an explanation why.

¹⁷ *New York Times*, May 7, 2007 and June 27, 2008. The case is *District of Columbia v. Heller*.