

# The Dilemmas of Pluralism

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Review: *After Nationalism: Being American in an Age of Division*, by Samuel Goldman (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 208 pp., \$24.95.

Sam Goldman describes his book as an “intervention in a very current debate” about American identity exacerbated by COVID-19 and identity politics: “an almost biblical plague and iconoclastic movement against racism” (4, 9). Elsewhere he has argued that the practical solution for the Republican Party, which he thinks is diseased with Trumpism, is a revived fusionist alliance between traditionalists and libertarians.<sup>1</sup> Here he defends his underlying pluralist political theory against conservatives who would resolve the current American identity crisis by a “renewal of national solidarity” (5). They, he says, mistakenly aspire a return to the anomalous liberal postwar consensus, which itself was a departure from the nation’s pluralist history. Goldman retells this history through symbols, and I will recapitulate his thesis (those familiar with it may skip to the next section) before offering criticism.

## COVENANT, CRUCIBLE, AND CREED

Goldman uses three “symbols by which Americans have tried to make sense of our differences—and our similarities” (2). Emerging in New England, the *covenant* symbolizes an America founded by divine providence for a chosen people, the Anglo-Puritans, who sought to preserve “a special relationship between the English settlers of the Atlantic Coast and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (2). It unifies by identification with a past sacred community, and it disproportionately colored American writing and identity for a century. But historically the covenant was limited by its insularity and hostility to different ethnicities and religions.

The *crucible* is the symbol for a nation whose ideal lies not in its past but in its future, in the melting together of different religions and ethnicities, such as Catholic Irish and Germans. It originated in the Middle Atlantic and looked to the progress of Manifest Destiny and a new kind of man. But the melting pot rhetoric of the early 1900s had limits. Poles,

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Goldman, “Republicans Have Another Option. It’s Not Trumpism,” *The New York Times*, August 31, 2020.

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Italians, Greeks, and Jews qualified as white for immigration purposes, but they were religiously and culturally different. Anglos became “increasingly pessimistic” about the possibility of an “ethnically and culturally unified people” (54). Fearing their own “race suicide,” they capped immigration in 1924 to freeze “America’s ethnic balance” (55, 57).

The *creed* symbolized American unity in abstract political principles of liberty and equality rather than tradition or “cultural or ethnic fusion” (52). Stated in the Declaration of Independence and hallowed by Abraham Lincoln, it became the “orthodoxy of midcentury liberalism” (65). The creed extended Americanism by replacing ethnic and religious identities with ‘white’ or Judeo-Christian commitments. Moreover, it promised to assimilate blacks and Asians in the fight for democracy against fascist and communist totalitarianism abroad. Americanism at home meant “individual rights, popular sovereignty, limited government, and preference for decentralized administration” (66).

The engine for the construction of each of these unifying symbols, argues Goldman, was war: symbols *followed*, and did not precede, conflict. The covenant followed King Philip’s War and was invoked against the French in 1754 and the British in 1775. The crucible followed the War of 1812 and the Mexican-American War. The creed was used in the Civil War to settle regional conflicts and create a “professional civil service, national policies to promote economic growth, and other features of European states” (73). But Lincoln introduced a tension between a unified nation and a “city on a hill,” a secular religion and messianic eschatology. Woodrow Wilson’s “universal ideals” promised to make the world safe for democracy, a “struggle between the forces of good and evil” beyond questions of national interest (76). The liberals extended this crusade. Planting military bases on every continent, the US claimed itself different than other exploitative, racist empires; it would disinterestedly bring the Four Freedoms to all humanity.

But, writes Goldman, “the search for a creedal nation was a failure” (65). America had always been pluralist, and the search for an un-American unity undermined American institutions through “political centralization, official propaganda, and the repression of dissent” (78). The creed promised cohesion, but the civil rights movement and defeat in Vietnam exposed core disagreements. Claims to universal equality conflicted with segregation, racism, and prejudice against Jews and Germans. Claims to universal rights conflicted with the suppression of anarchists and socialists’ speech. By 1972 the creed “lay

in ruins” (86). The disruptive 1960s brought nostalgia, or the desire for a sense of familiarity, in Ronald Reagan’s promise to “make America Great Again” (108).

In chapter four, Goldman treats the culture wars of the 1990s. Conservatives pushed a noble lie to unify a diverse and stratified society, and the Left produced its own unifying myths in multiculturalism. Each used history to tell us who we are or should be, not who we were, and this is “a burden history cannot bear” (97). Individuals *imagine* what they have not experienced and thus confuse their thoughts for truly collective memories. Cultural imagination also provides *selective* meanings to different groups. American memory sustains conflict. One can either tell a “shared story of progressive triumph” or portray America “as a series of defeats for native populations, for blacks, for workers, and for disfavored immigrants”; rich white males “won freedom and equality by taking them from others” (103–4). Conservatives reduce “history instruction to a patriotic fable” and multiculturalists “imagine civic education to be a massive graduate seminar” feeding utopian illusions (111). Still, liberals warned, absent a unifying myth to give political legitimacy, a strongman would provide one to rise to power in an economic recession—Goldman points to Donald Trump.

“We live ‘after nationalism,’” concludes Goldman (119). Americans are not just divided into different groups; they are divided in themselves, desiring personal freedom for alternative lifestyles. Attempts to limit pluralism only produce “rival accounts of what America is” (119). Goldman rejects the covenant, whose “characteristic vision of a virtuous society is simply too limited to bind together a diverse people” (37). Arguments about nationalism are often without content, just appeals to unity. While political legitimacy for some nations may be ethnocentrically rooted in “an organic and previously existing community,” the American people is “generated and sustained by ... interactions under specific institutions” (13). He disagrees with restricting immigration to achieve assimilation, citing “the growth of anti-Semitism in the 1930s” (123). Rather “the alternative to consensus is chaos” (119). Drawing from various authors (including the 1619 Project), Goldman proposes a combination of the crucible and creed. Frederick Douglass’s “composite nationalism”—the principle of “civil equality to the people of all races and of all creeds”—can be wedded to public confessions that Americans have violated their creed in imperialism, racism, and intolerance (125). Francis Fukuyama’s “shared values” of “constitutionalism, rule of law, and human equality” can accommodate recent “cultural, social, and political

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revolutions” to produce a “way of governing rather than inherited characteristics” (124-25). And John Rawls’s “constitutional consensus” is “limited to ‘the political procedures of democratic government’” (126). “Constitutionalism, the rule of law, and civic equality” provide “rules of coexistence for people who otherwise don’t share much” (126). Finally, in Patrick Deneen’s notion of a “community of communities,” the “basic units are not individuals ... but a variety of overlapping and sometimes contending groups that reflect and cultivate different conceptions of identity, responsibility, and purpose” (127).

Goldman’s solution is not to “restore an elusive consensus” but to “strengthen institutions of contestation,” the “organizations and structures that express and embody *disagreement*. Political parties, labor unions, and religious communities must be allowed to pursue their clashing views of public policy, economic issues, and the meaning of life. It is through their conflict that we will discover the terms on which we can live together” (9). Turning away from ideological consensus, we compromise as we articulate different interests stemming from “organizational and communal autonomy” (10). This is the best we can do: alternatives, warns Goldman, that “impose a monolithic understanding of national unity risk undermining the legitimacy of the political system, decrease trust among members of different social groups, and encourage extreme, even violent measures of self-protection” (126-27).

### GOLDMAN’S HISTORY

A brief historical narrative like Goldman’s must prioritize certain facts—its value lies more in concision and the explanatory power of its categories than in scholarly debate. But Goldman’s symbols as representatives of diverse groups coexisting in a pluralist kaleidoscope frequently break down. We find that the covenant is also the crucible, which is also the creed. The Federalist covenant, for example, is also an argument that Americans should *become* “a relatively homogenous nation comparable to the great peoples of Europe” (20). The symbols that Goldman teases apart seem to be essential components of *every* political order. *Covenant* means traditions that unify a people in a way of life. *Crucible* means sharing a common vision of the future. *Creed* means a principled defense of the regime to educate the next generation. Goldman’s isolated symbolics prevent him from showing their roles in a changing American order: its identity, institutions, and basic legal categories like citizenship.

## PIETAS

It is easy to tell a pluralist story because one can always find dissenters in every age. But to understand the American people one must turn to public documents that reflected the common sense of each era. For example, in an American consensus, Federalists and Republicans in 1795 extended residency for naturalization from two to five years, as well as passed the Eleventh Amendment (not mentioned by Goldman) that affirmed republican rule by limiting challenges against sovereign states in federal courts. A survey of state laws shows remarkable similarities in local governance, religious beliefs, and marriage law—the habits of a people shaped by the rights and rituals of citizenship.

A key element of the social contract is that the citizens choose who can join their body politic; none have a natural right to be admitted. Goldman fails to clarify that blacks were not US citizens: they were inhabitants or “denizens,” granted some legal rights subject to change or repeal. Congress voted to include only whites in the 1790 Naturalization Law, and in no state did blacks have complete civil and political equality. Northern states and territories both banned slavery *and* limited blacks’ civil rights. Anti-miscegenation laws were passed in Massachusetts (and Maine) and Rhode Island in 1786 and 1798. In the 1780s New Jersey and Connecticut barred the importation of slaves as a threat to “white labour.” Cities like Boston excluded blacks from public schools. In 1833 Connecticut prohibited the creation of private schools for black nonresidents to discourage the growth of the black population, which contributed “thereby to the injury of the people.” In 1802 Ohio both banned slavery *and* denied voting rights to black males while granting them some civil rights; to discourage black immigration, Ohio only permitted blacks upon proof of freedom and the payment of prohibitive bonds as high as \$1,000. Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan banned both slavery *and* black immigration, the latter by barring their employment, voiding all contracts made with them, and even appropriating money for their emigration. The Indiana Supreme Court concluded, “The policy of the state is ... clearly ... to exclude any further ingress of negroes, and to remove those already among us as speedily as possible.” By 1850 blacks constituted less than 2 percent of the northern population and less than 1 percent in the territories.

Rather than Goldman’s story of pluralism and more than a simple story of prejudice (whether Americans thought other peoples were capable of self-government) the Founders saw diversity as a threat to their republican way of life; it characterized British imperial rule over disjointed populations of subjects (not citizens). Goldman admits that there was little

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diversity in the American Founding: a citizen body 90 percent British, 60 percent English, and 98 percent Protestant, with very few Catholics and Jews. Because the homogeneity of the American citizenry poses problems for his argument, he must play up regional differences, such as the New England covenant. By attributing Christian republicanism to New England, he can dismiss a unifying republican way of life. He spends pages on Puritan history, such as the Halfway Covenant, when arguably Puritanism was dead by 1730. Goldman identifies state-sponsored religion and equality with the New England covenant so he can describe it as a failed attempt “to constitute all of America as an offshoot of the Puritan experience” (17). But *all* states variously supported the Christian religion: state churches, tax-exempt status, public prayer, prayer and Bible-reading in schools, and blasphemy laws. And an egalitarian agrarian empire of small farmers was achieved by selling federal lands. Goldman sees a break between covenant and crucible, the end of “Christian republicanism” in favor of “Jeffersonian democracy,” precisely when one finds growing American nationalism in Christian republicanism. In the Era of Good Feelings, the Federalists were absorbed by compromises over the role of the federal government after the War of 1812.

Goldman’s regional crucible also breaks down: transcendentalists from *New England* (not the Mid-Atlantic states) preached the crucible’s voluntarism and rebirth. He argues that the Louisiana Territory committed America to “expansion, cultural absorption, and slavery” (32). But the Northwest Territories *were* an expansion, and the Constitution planned for the admission of new republican states. Goldman questions John O’Sullivan’s presumption that “Mexicans and Indians would ‘amalgamate and be lost’ in the new people being born” (48). But those populations were small, and largely they were assimilated, like the millions of Irish and Germans who assimilated during the war. Goldman describes the Nativist Party as inheritor of the New England covenant, when it was national, rising up in cities like Chicago and New York, and for good reason: Irish immigrants brought disease, soaring crime, and welfare costs. State laws excluded foreign paupers and criminals. Massachusetts and New York developed extensive systems to restrict destitute foreigners and deport them back to Europe. Massachusetts law restricted legal residency to US citizens; any denizen seeking relief at a public almshouse was subject to deportation to “any other state, or to any place beyond [the] sea, where he belongs.” As to slavery, the Missouri Compromise ended the expansion of it in 1820, but the Mexican Cession reignited the conflict thirty years later.

## PIETAS

The Civil War was fought over slavery, which violated republicanism. Because Goldman sets aside republicanism, he incorrectly sees the Civil War as a fight against racism. But Lincoln understood equality to mean natural rights, which conflicted with slavery. Arguably he never included blacks among the citizenry, with privileges and immunities of citizenship. He recurred to self-deportation and colonization in his second annual message to Congress, in which he affirmed, “I strongly favor colonization.” And it is unclear whether his preference to confer voting rights in Louisiana to blacks—“on the very intelligent, and on those who serve our cause as soldiers”—is an appeal for national citizenship. Thus Goldman indicts the North on false grounds, that it should have kept an occupying army in the South. One wonders why he indicts the North at all, given his own pluralist commitment to “rules of coexistence for people who otherwise don’t share much” (126). It was Stephen Douglas, not Lincoln, who said that he did not “care whether slavery is voted up or voted down.” Still Goldman concludes, “The price of national reconciliation for whites was allowing the construction of a racial caste system” (52). But even to radical Republicans *there was no compromise*. The signers of the Fourteenth Amendment who admitted blacks to citizenship (while still excluding Asians) also segregated Washington, D.C. schools. Goldman fails to see their undergirding principles: they attempted to secure equal protection for the new black citizens, but to preserve republicanism they recognized states’ rights to determine the rights of *state* citizenship. National civil rights, ruled the Supreme Court, did not include “the social rights of men and races in the community” but only “those fundamental rights which appertain to the essence of citizenship,” such as the right to travel, equal access to “public conveyances,” the right to contract in business, and (with the Fifteenth Amendment) the right to vote. State legislatures could still restrict voting rights based on sex, literacy, and property: paupers could still not vote in one-fourth of states in 1938. In varying state legislation, eleven states repealed their anti-miscegenation laws before 1887, while thirty states (sixteen in the South) kept them.

Thus Goldman’s history of the growth of American government as a response to the Civil War seems incomplete. The federal government’s first large bureaucracy, the Freedmen’s Bureau (created to uplift freed slaves), only operated from 1865–72. If Goldman looked to institutional facts like the change in the local proportion of nonmilitary governmental expenditures or to the merely *advisory* rather than lawmaking power of state and federal boards and commissions (like the Interstate Commerce Commission), then he

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would see that political changes followed a crisis of faith among Anglos,<sup>2</sup> who in the 1880s began to reject Christianity and republicanism for Social Gospel and scientific rule. The administrative state seems to have *followed* diversity: the creation of bureaucracies to manage the new immigrant populations. Progressive jurist Roscoe Pound argued that the “American common-law polity presupposes a homogeneous population, which is jealous of its rights.”<sup>3</sup> Southeastern European immigrants, he said, were incapable of self-government, so an elite class of WASPs must use a new sociological jurisprudence to rule them and especially their families: “The powers of the star chamber,” he said, “were a trifle in comparison with those of our juvenile courts and courts of domestic relations.”<sup>4</sup>

Nor is Goldman’s idea that Americans have always been divided in themselves accurate. The sexual revolution was the project of a growing liberal elite that both wanted freedom from the older sexual strictures and saw the benefits of a new science of control over diverse populations. Even Leftists like Herbert Marcuse who endorsed “polymorphous perversity” saw its dangerous potential. But Goldman’s limited history again bends his conclusions. The New Left, he writes elsewhere, “discredited the left for a generation or more” by caving to capitalism.<sup>5</sup> But the New Left that prioritized race and gender over class successfully implemented what he recognizes as today’s institutional religion of “antiracism.”

### GOLDMAN’S CENTRAL COMMITMENTS

Goldman says his book is informed by “two central” commitments, that of a scholar who challenges myths, even when doing so “seem[s] uncomfortable or inconvenient,” and that of a patriot who believes that the US is worthy of “loyalty, celebration, and, when necessary, defense”—it demands special obligations of its citizens (11-12). But the commitments of a scholar should invite Goldman to challenge his own pluralist views.

As to Goldman’s commitments, he is clearly *against* the covenant. To allow for the assimilation of newcomers, Russell Kirk revived the symbol in the 1950s and Samuel Huntington in the 1990s as an attempt to find in Anglo tradition a middle way between

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<sup>2</sup> Goldman, “How the WASPs Won by Losing,” *The Week*, August 4, 2021, thinks this crisis occurred in the 1920s.

<sup>3</sup> Roscoe Pound, “The Administration of Justice in the Modern City,” *Harvard Law Review* 26, no. 4 (February 1913): 309.

<sup>4</sup> Pound, “Foreword,” in Pauline V. Young, *Social Treatment in Probation and Delinquency* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1937), xxvii.

<sup>5</sup> Goldman, “The Capitol riot’s roots in the New Left,” *The Week*, January 6, 2022.

identity grounded in European heredity and abstract creeds. But Goldman rejects the Right's refocus on "national solidarity" and the folkways that bind a people. He is "skeptical that we can restore a coherent enduring sense of shared identity and purpose" (5), and his history services this end by poking holes in narratives of national unity.

Moreover, Goldman is apparently *committed to neoliberalism*. The key fact of his thesis, the rejection of the creed in the 1960s, should spur him to reflect on the neoliberal consensus that replaced it. But his history altogether omits this tense partnership between corporate and bureaucratic elites that shared views on justice, institutions, and policies like globalization and open borders. He uses the word *neoliberal* once in the mouth of nationalists as a *bête noire* for their frights. Yet his solution simply *restates* neoliberal theories of justice and institutions while failing to point out their long-exposed and fatal flaws. For example, Rawls's theory of procedural justice, constructed in the supposed absence of any common good, contradicts the hierarchy of goods he smuggled in the back door. *Reasonable* participants, said Rawls, could not be pro-life.<sup>6</sup> Institutionally, Rawls's "difference principle" justified the affirmative action implemented by administrative agencies since 1970. Yet Goldman is silent about this *affirmation of inequality under the law*. Nor does he treat the "Great Awakening," monopoly capitalism's alliance with identity politics to legitimize its rule and punish its dissenters.

Goldman fails to treat how the covenant, glory in one's racial past, is alive and well in identity politics. Calling themselves antiracists, its advocates have pushed a war on "whiteness" in media, academia, business, and government. The 1619 Project, in addition to its historical inaccuracies, peddles race hatred and hatred of the American Founding. Goldman elsewhere only voices cautious concern over removing statues of the American Founders because they remind us of a troubled past: "Canceling their stories and monuments prevents us from understanding why they succeeded—and failed."<sup>7</sup> Since Goldman is against national solidarity, one might think he favors a full-throated pluralism. Eric Kaufmann, for example, argues that a white identity politics, or a revived covenant for white Christians, is necessary to achieve a truly pluralist society. This is entirely consistent with Goldman's pluralist thesis and even its logical conclusion, but he balks when confronted with it.

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<sup>6</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 243.

<sup>7</sup> Goldman, "America Has a Ruling Class," *The New York Times*, March 31, 2021.

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Thus Goldman is not telling a simple historical narrative; he is taking a side in a historical debate as to what America is and should be. He guardedly admits that consensus is possible—in the early republic, the national origins quota, and the “unusual level of social consensus” in 1950s America (123). Economic nationalists aspire to revive it today. Rather, Goldman believes that consensus comes at too high a cost of social conformity, such as anti-Semitism or the “exclusion of African Americans” (6). It unjustly asks “non-Yankees to give up too much of their own history” (38). Jews, for example, could not hold office in Founding Era Pennsylvania because they could not take the oath. The Jewish response was assimilation. But following the Progressive Era migrations, Horace Kallen (cited by Goldman) and Alain Locke each formulated a theory of teaching racial pride for Jews and blacks while promoting the “cultural pluralism” of American identity. To preserve a “separate national existence” for Jews free from anti-Semitism, Maurice Samuel argued for a secular American identity removed from religious, moral, and ethnic traditions.<sup>8</sup> “If America had any meaning,” it was the founding of a “state [as] purely an ideal,” and thus its duty was to secure “the most elementary human right, the right of asylum.” America, said Hans Kohn, “was not founded on the common attributes of nationhood—language, cultural tradition, historical territory or common descent—but on an idea, which singled out the new nation among the nations of the earth.”<sup>9</sup> Kohn envisioned an international federation—he took Austro-Hungary as his model—that by representing multiple nations as subgroups could balance and manage them.

Pluralism as Goldman’s book describes it was not present at the American Founding—it began in the 1920s. To stop the chaotic, destabilizing migrations, the progressives passed the national origins quota in the 1924 Immigration Act, which allotted 70 percent of visas to just three European countries. The effect was that American citizens of all races repopulated themselves. From 1930–50 America’s foreign-born population *decreased* from 14.2 to 10.3 million, or from 11.6 to 6.9 percent of the total population. By 1960 it was only 5.4 percent. But this offended some minority groups. Resentful of WASP dominance and assimilation, they lobbied to both increase their own numbers and promote diversity. They took the lead fighting the national origins quota and worked for its repeal, and they lobbied for the 1965

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<sup>8</sup> Maurice Samuel, *You Gentiles* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1924), 122, 76–77, 31–32, 218–19.

<sup>9</sup> Hans Kohn, *American Nationalism: An Interpretative Essay* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 8.

Immigration Act to weaken the Anglo majority.<sup>10</sup> Billed as introducing more Greeks and Poles, the act privileged cheap Latin American and Asian labor. Immigration policy ever since has been controlled not by American voters, but by special interests: Republicans who want cheap labor and Democrats who want votes. Each secured benefits for its own constituency, to the absurd effect that American diversity policy gives legal preference to the vast majority of immigrants who never experienced discrimination under Jim Crow.

The outsized turn of the century migrations brought a new struggle of the ethnic orders, the product of which was a secular, liberal elite—lapsed Protestants, Catholics, and Jews—that rejected progressives’ ethnocentrism for a theory of population management that changed the demographics of the country to favor an unbounded importation of asylees and migrants. Democrats have long attributed their “emerging majority” to unimpeded mass migration and intentional demographic change. Goldman himself agrees this is an issue driving our politics, yet he is unable to address the question—he suggests such ideas belong to white racism.<sup>11</sup>

In Goldman’s defense, it seems that by giving the Founders a pluralist identity he is diminishing the simple charge of white racism by marinating it in a European stew of religious and ethnic conflicts. But a more honest and sympathetic view of the Founding would recognize that as a sovereign people, they had the right to admit or exclude anyone they wanted—just as the nations of Austria, China, and Israel do today. The majority of whites chose to admit blacks as citizens, followed by Indians then Asians, but they stressed assimilation. Goldman recognizes the success of assimilation of the 1950s, but he fails to recognize the threat of diversity. With the rise of a globalist elite, there is no longer the slightest attempt to enforce immigration law. Millions of illegal aliens cross the southern border each year; many are transported into the middle of the country. Goldman is hard-pressed to show how this chaotic pluralism has not undermined the representative institutions he proffers as a solution.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Jewish groups organized in opposition to the 1924 Immigration Act; see Esther Panitz, “In Defense of the Jewish Immigrant,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (September 1965): 57-97; “Militant Action Against Johnson Immigration Bill,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, March 4, 1924; “136 Organizations Respond to United Hebrew Trades’ Call for Conference on Proposed Immigration Measure,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 28, 1924; “United Hias Reviews Forty Years of Jewish Immigration to U.S.,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, September 29, 1965; Hugh Davis Graham, *Collision Course: The Strange Convergence of Affirmative Action and Immigration Policy in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56-57.

<sup>11</sup> See Zack Beauchamp’s interview with Goldman in “A conservative intellectual explains why the GOP has fallen to Donald Trump,” *Vox*, September 22, 2016.

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My harshest criticism is that, despite recognizing that a view of community is inseparable from its conception of justice and institutions, Goldman continues as if the two may be separated. This false distinction troubles the whole book. Goldman correctly suggests a revival of political parties to represent local interests, but here he must mean something much broader than common usage. A true revival of strong parties would require reclaiming sovereignty from the bureaucracy, purging its placeholders, and ending race- and gender-based privileges and distributions that identity groups see as deserved graft. Moreover, it would require drastic action on immigration and trade policies that have destroyed local communities. Barring a return to equal citizenship under the law, Goldman's institutionalism of "constitutionalism, rule of law, and human equality" has no grounding. He argues for a "way of governing rather than inherited characteristics, such as ethnic origin or family religious affiliation" (125), but this only seems to apply to whites. Goldman's warnings of "centralized control" (which he oddly says—in the midst of COVID-19—is "not very appealing today," 123) only include the Cold War and Jim Crow, which ended sixty years ago. Today's pluralists *laud* centralized control—COVID vaccines and privileging assigned identities—but Goldman is silent about defunding "antiracist" curriculum or smashing corporate monopolies. Thus I agree with Goldman's solution, but he seems glib about the severity of our problems and naive as to what kind of radical solutions they require.

### THE DILEMMAS OF PLURALISM

Goldman's political pluralism stems from what he describes as a dialectical method of thought. Political theory, he says, has focused too much on unifying theories or what Leo Strauss called "regimes," in which a people is defined by its common work. Strauss's view, he says, requires "a greater degree of coherence and stability than increased appreciation for equal personhood and the vast extent of modern states permits."<sup>12</sup> Goldman compares his own method to G.W.F. Hegel's dialectics: negation is the engine of Hegel's dialectic, just as Goldman treats conflicting opinions of American identity. But Goldman's writings bear no resemblance to Hegel's rigorous logic or absolutist philosophy. Unlike Hegel's dialectic, which takes each given proposition to its logical conclusion to discover its inner contradictions in search of a higher truth, Goldman superficially skips about, musing on

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<sup>12</sup> Goldman, "Liberty and Our Political Order," *Law & Liberty*, December 21, 2020.

various opinions to find a hypothetical middle ground. But there is no genuine attempt to carve along the joints of a thing and then reassemble it to understand its essence. Scott Yenor writes that Goldman’s “description of our present discontents is of the ‘neither-this-nor-that’ variety.”<sup>13</sup> In Hegel’s state, rational institutions must be rooted in nation, common customs and mores: a “second nature” uniting affection with Immanuel Kant’s cold institutionalism. Goldman’s method really services a political position—a defense of the neoliberal status quo.

The great danger, mid-century liberals said, was ideology (fascist and communist). Thus, the pluralist undercuts all absolutist views; he takes the divisions that occur in any political regime, claims they *are* the regime, and then labels diversity as its *goal*. Liberals wrote narratives of America as pluralist from its conception, a “nation of immigrants.”<sup>14</sup> But the liberals avoided crucial political questions. The concept of nation, for example, is part of an identity that commands sacrifice. Goldman admits this sacrifice is necessary, yet he never dialectically advances to what *our* identity of citizenship for protecting equal rights would be or how it is formed, else *citizens* become *subjects* who are accorded various privileges based on overlapping and assigned group identities. But at some point, young men must die for a community that must be educated as more important than life itself. One fights either because he is defending *his* people or because he is a mercenary. The former is a bedrock of republicanism, the latter is empire; the former rules by honor and shame, the latter by pleasure and pain. Goldman warns that a sense of commonality risks totalitarian measures; fine, but he never says how his state institutions alone provide anything more than mercenaries. Just as friendship requires spilling much salt together, republican communities require an orthodoxy or common opinion. And while Goldman can appeal to toleration for all positions, he never states diversity’s limits—he simply trusts it has none.

Goldman’s theory has concrete political ramifications. The progressive *Vox* calls him “one of the most influential conservative intellectuals” (an endorsement a conservative might be suspicious of).<sup>15</sup> He writes, “Because I don’t think we ever had a regime in the classical

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<sup>13</sup> Scott Yenor, “The American Disease,” *Law & Liberty*, December 7, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> *Whom We Shall Welcome: Report of the President’s Commission on Immigration and Naturalization* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953), 12, 23; Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1952), 3; John F. Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964).

<sup>15</sup> Zack Beauchamp’s interview with Goldman in “A conservative intellectual explains why the GOP has fallen to Donald Trump,” *Vox*, September 22, 2016.

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sense, I'm somewhat less worried about losing it.”<sup>16</sup> Thus the statesman, whose task is to transcend group interest to act for the good of the *whole* people, has no place in Goldman's view. Moreover, Goldman blurs the role of the conservative intellectual who wades into the changing tides of politics. Because all moralities seek to become absolute, the current conservative intellectual task, responding to Leftist dominance in American educational institutions, would seem to be to fortify conservative identities on the right. Indeed, Goldman must presuppose these strong identities for his fusionism to work—compromise must be grounded in a position of strength. By refusing to clarify a conservative identity, the pluralist only succeeds in demoralizing his own side by advocating its constant concessions over core rights—the laughable “standing athwart history and yelling stop!” Yet nowhere do I find Goldman taking a *strong* position against the rioting in the summer of 2020 and transgenderism. Instead he attacks MAGA Republicans by comparing them to the New Left.

If only! The true lesson of the New Left is its successful long march through American institutions, including Goldman's own, George Washington University, where students toppled a statue of George Washington. But where he might advise a similar long march for the Right, he accepts the Left's charge of racism and attacks the Republican populist base: “If you project yourself as a white Christian provincial party, you're not going to get very many votes among people who are none of those things.”<sup>17</sup> The MAGA voters, Goldman says, are the last gasp of the declining demographic, “the culture and interests of downscale whites.” It remains to be seen whether Goldman is correct about the trajectory of the Republican Party—Trump's economic nationalism did better with minority voters than any of Goldman's Never-Trumpers. Thus Goldman's warning that impositions of a national identity will undermine the regime's legitimacy, decrease trust among social groups, and encourage extreme measures of self-protection seem backward. Rather pluralists' paeans to “diversity as our strength” have destroyed the regime's legitimacy, led to decreasing social trust among groups, and empowered the Left's vicious priesthood of “diversity, inclusion, and equity.” All of this legitimizes a cosmopolitan corporate ruling class that sacrifices American history and traditions, and ultimately republican institutions and freedom, for its own gain. This kind of regime is not a liberal democracy; it is a despotism or kleptocracy.

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<sup>16</sup> Goldman, “Liberty and Our Political Order,” *Law & Liberty*, December 21, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Goldman, “After Conservatism,” *The American Conservative*, August 30, 2016.