A Question of Values

THIS BOOK IS AN ATTEMPT to regard old questions about moral values from a new angle. By doing so, I hope to clarify the widespread perception at the turn of the millennium of an American crisis of values.

I chose the words "perception" and "American crisis of values" intentionally. I use "perception" because I do not begin this treatise with the assumption that there *is* a crisis, only that many Americans *perceive* a crisis—real or not. The reality of a crisis and the perception of a crisis are separable questions. For example, it is possible that many Americans believe society is divided when it comes to the most important values when it is not. I use "American crisis of values" rather than "a crisis of American values" because the discourse about moral crisis covers a much wider range of values than the five that make up the core values of the American ideology (liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire[1]). Thus, I will explore the question of values over a broad moral territory, including traditional values, secular values, religious values, family values, economic values, and others.

In this introductory chapter, I briefly describe the perception of a crisis of values in America, citing some of the leading voices in public and intellectual debates, as well as the voice of the American people heard through national surveys and studies. Next, I present three ways to think about a crisis of values: as a loss over time of traditional values, as an unfavorable comparison to the value systems of other societies, and crisis as a division of society into opposed groups based on competing moral visions. These are, respectively, the trend hypothesis, the comparative hypothesis, and the distribution hypothesis. I introduce these hypotheses here as an overview but reserve their theoretical justification and empirical testing for later chapters. Finally, I discuss the concept of America as an "imagined community" and consider what a crisis of values means for the twin problems that

confront the imagined community of a nation-state: the problem of legitimacy and the problem of social integration. I conclude this chapter with an overview of the book.

THE WIDESPREAD PERCEPTION OF CRISIS

The perception of an American crisis of values is real; scholars, journalists, politicians, and other participant-observers of American culture have chronicled it for some years. Popular versions include Allan Bloom's indictment of American education in *The Closing of the American Mind;* the caustic effects of runaway individualism described by Robert Bellah and associates in *Habits of the Heart,* a theme reiterated by Francis Fukuyama in *The Great Disruption;* William Bennett's remedial moral education program in *The Book of Virtues* designed to lift America out of "moral poverty"; Robert Hughes's acerbic account of the "fraying" of America in *Culture of Complaint;* John Miller's condemnation in *Egotopia* of the physical and moral "ugliness" of America's consumer society; the loss of virtues and character, portrayed variously by Gertrude Himmelfarb in *The De-Moralization of Society,* Richard Sennett in *The Corrosion of Character,* and James Davison Hunter in *The Death of Character;* and Robert Putnam's "bowling alone" metaphor of America's declining social capital and his call for civic reengagement.[2] "Americans once proudly emphasized their uniqueness," observes Seymour Martin Lipset, "their differences from the rest of the world, the vitality of their democracy, the growth potential of their economy. Some now worry that our best years as a nation are behind us."[3] America, it seems, has fallen from grace.

There does not appear to be a lack of hard evidence of the decline of American society. For example, in *The State of Americans,* Urie Bronfenbrenner and associates review a mass of statistical data and paint a portrait of "societal chaos" in America.[4] Other attempts to chart the course of American society reveal the same trends, such as those reported in The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators, an effort to track the moral and ethical trends of our times much as the gov-

ernment's Index of Leading Economic Indicators tracks economic trends.[5] This cultural index is a composite of twenty-two different trends in American society, including measures of political participation, trust in others and confidence in the federal government, church membership, participation in voluntary groups, violent crime, and family statistics. The statistics used in this index are consistent with those reported in sociological analyses of census and other data, such as reported in *State of the Union*, edited by Reynolds Farley.[6] (Recent reversals of some of these trends are typically dismissed as misleading or simply too modest to indicate true reversals.[7]) To these telling statistics one can add any number of sad and tragic events from the closing years of the century, ranging from the impeachment of President Bill Clinton for lying under oath about his sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky to the massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, where students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold murdered thirteen and wounded twenty-three more.

For many, such statistics and events represent the descent of American society into moral confusion, perhaps even moral anarchy. It is a question of values. Values are concepts people use to make choices, to decide courses of action, to explain and justify behaviors, to judge and to be judged. Values are "modes of organizing conduct," defines Robin Williams, emotionally invested "principles that guide human action."[8] My main concern is *moral values*—fundamental values about right and wrong, good and evil, noble and base—that live in the hearts of people and are embodied in institutions.[9] Moral values form "the core of the individual's internalized conscience."[10] Violations of moral values evoke shame, remorse, and guilt in the offender who holds them. And because they represent central values of society, violations of moral values invoke strong sanctions from the community—censure, ostracism, condemnation, and punishment in many and varied forms. It is this capacity—the will to make moral judgments and to invoke strong sanctions—that many social critics claim Americans have lost.

Bronfenbrenner and associates conclude their book with the grave interpretation that "values commonly judged as 'good' seem in decline, including honesty, a sense of personal responsibility, respect for

others anchored in a sense of the dignity and worth of every individual."[11] Similarly, Bennett and associates argue that America has "experienced an astonishing degree of social regression." Today, they conclude, "[l]arge segments of America are characterized by moral confusion, indolence, indifference, and distraction."[12] Bennett sounds a dire warning in a 1995 Heritage Foundation address: "Current trends in out-of-wedlock births, crime, drug use, family decomposition, and educational decline, as well as a host of other social pathologies, are incompatible with the continuation of American society as we know it. If these things continue, the republic as we know it will cease to be."[13] He repeats the warning in his 1998 best seller, *The Death of Outrage*, lamenting President Clinton's misconduct, the decline of America's values, and the nation's incapacity to make moral judgments.[14] America, he says, has lost its "moral compass."[15] The lost compass is a common metaphor in popular literature. For example, Stephen Covey asserts, "Our moral compass is thrown off, and we don't even know it. The needle that in less turbulent times pointed easily to 'true north'—or the principles that govern in all of life—is being jerked about by the powerful electric and magnetic fields of the storm."[16]

Most Americans seem to agree, as reported in various national surveys and studies conducted from the mid-1990s through 2003. In 1993 and 1994, for example, 62 percent of Americans reported that "Americans are greatly divided when it comes to the most important values." Men and women felt exactly the same way; African Americans were only slightly more likely than whites to feel that the American people are greatly divided when it comes to the most important values (69 versus 60 percent, respectively).[17] In 1995 about 86 percent of Americans agreed that "there was a time when people in this country felt they had more in common and shared more values than Americans do today."[18] The 1996 Survey of American Public Culture reported that 90 percent of Americans felt that the country was not improving overall; 52 percent said the country was actually in decline.[19] Almost 90 percent of middle-class Americans feel that "it has become much harder to raise children in our society," reports Alan Wolfe in his 1998 Middle Class Morality Project, and 67 per-

cent say that, "compared to twenty years ago, Americans have become more selfish."[20] A Pew survey of religion and public life, conducted in spring 2001, found that 55 percent of Americans felt that religion was "losing its significance" as an influence on American life. This figure dropped to 12 percent in mid-November 2001, two months after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, but rose again to 52 percent in March 2002, six months after the attacks.[21] In the same March 2002 survey, three of four Americans said "no" in response to the question, "Do you think people in general today lead as good lives—honest and moral—as they used to?" The same proportion of Americans said "no" to the question, "Do you think that young people today have as strong a sense of right and wrong as they did, say, fifty years ago?" And, in a May 2003 Gallup Poll, 77 percent of Americans rated the "overall state of moral values in this country today" as "only fair" or "poor."[22] In the same poll, 67 percent of Americans said they "think the state of moral values in the country" is "getting worse."

These private feelings of decline, discord, and division are given public voice by those who believe America is engaged in a "culture war" over its future. Sociologist James Davison Hunter came up with the first systematic statement of the culture war thesis.[23] Many resonated with the statement and made it part of everyday discourse. For example, at the 1992 Republican National Convention, Pat Buchanan proclaimed, "There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a culture war as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America." Buchanan's claim cannot be dismissed as mere hyperbole or conservative political rhetoric; it represents a major and pervasive theme in discourse about American society. "Images of U.S. society as polarized into warring moral camps are increasingly evoked by political leaders, media pundits, and scholars alike," observe Nancy Davis and Robert Robinson.[24] Indeed, about 1,500 articles referring to the American culture war appeared in the media between 1993 and 1996,[25] as well as countless references to the culture war on talk radio and television and in political speeches, public debates, and everyday conversations.

The perception of a "crisis of values" is clear and widespread; the causes of the perception are not. We are experiencing, conclude Bronfenbrenner and associates, "nothing less than a transformation of America's culture by forces not well understood, in directions many of its people do not want."[26] Understanding these not-well-understood forces is a goal of this book. Rather than adding my voice to the din of alarm and concern about the symptoms of America in decline, I report what Americans actually say about moral values. I explore the murky realm of underlying causes of the perception of a crisis of values. By doing so, I hope to provide a fresh explanation of the root causes of the question of values in American society. Following Max Weber and Clifford Geertz, I view this as an exercise of interpretation. As Geertz argues, "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning."[27] My objective, therefore, is to interpret the changing webs of significance spun of values in American culture.

Three Ways to Think About a Crisis of Values — Loss, Unfavorable Comparison, and Division

The various social critics I cited above are an eclectic mix of perspectives, levels of analysis, and foci of interest. Some are empiricists, analyzing and interpreting data, while others are theorists or social commentators. Some focus on symptoms; others focus on underlying causes. Despite its variety, three key themes run through this literature: three ways to think about America's crisis of values. I describe each theme below, which I formulate as hypotheses and test empirically in later chapters.

The first way to think about the crisis of values is a loss over time of traditional values, and with it the capacity or will to make moral judgments. What are traditional values? Many societies have existed in the course of human history; some historic "traditions" would not qualify as "traditions" in America today. For example, as Ronald In-

glehart and I wrote, "Infanticide was common in hunting and gathering societies, but became rare in agrarian societies; homosexuality was accepted in some preindustrial societies; and women are believed to have dominated political and social life in some preindustrial societies."[28] We note, however, that data on preindustrial societies nonetheless reveal some common characteristics that can be considered traditional values: the importance of religion and God; absolute standards of good and evil; the importance of family life; deference to authority; the dominance of men in social, political, and economic life; and intolerance of abortion, divorce, euthanasia, and suicide.[29] The opposite of these traditional values are secular-rational values, sometimes called "modern" or "postmodern" values.[30] Here, "secular" means nonreligious, while "rational" refers to the "rationalization of all spheres of society" (as Weber put it), including the use of reason, logic, science, and means-end calculations rather than religion or long-established customs to govern social, political, and economic life.[31] (This use of "rational" does not imply that traditional values are "irrational.") Secular-rational values include the lack (or low levels) of religious beliefs and beliefs in the importance of God; relative standards of good and evil; gender equality; lack of deference to authority; and acceptance of abortion, divorce, euthanasia, and suicide.

Traditional values and secular-rational values are the poles of a single fundamental dimension of cultural variation, as extensive research using the World Values Surveys has shown.[32] If American society has lost its traditional values, then we should observe a significant movement along this dimension. This movement would correspond to the "secularization"[33] of culture in America. I call this the trend hypothesis of the crisis of values, for it represents the replacement over time of traditional values by secular-rational values.

The second way to think about the crisis of values is to compare American society with other societies. An unfavorable comparison would contribute to the perception of crisis in America. Indeed, many of the worries and fears about America arise in comparisons with other societies. The basis of comparison takes various forms, ranging from economic performance to social statistics to moral val-

ues. As Lipset notes, "The American difference, the ways in which the United States varies from the rest of the world, is a constant topic of discussion and in recent years, of concern. Is the country in decline economically and morally? Is Japan about to replace it as the leading economic power? Why does the United States have the highest crime rate, the most persons per capita in prison? Does the growth in the proportion of illegitimate births of single-mother families reflect basic changes in our moral order? Why is our electoral turnout rate so low?"[34] Another expression of unfavorable comparison is trepidation about the Americanization of the world—the "contamination" of other cultures by the importation of certain American values, especially the capitalist values of individualism, secularism, and crass consumerism. The deleterious cultural effects of American capitalism are sometimes called the Coca-Colaization or the Hollywoodization or the McDonaldization of society.[35]

An examination of the effects of American society on other cultures is outside the purpose and scope of this book. Rather, I compare the American value system with the value systems of other societies around the world. An unfavorable comparison would mean that America is similar to societies with secularized value systems and different from societies with traditional value systems. Moreover, the paths of value change for America and other societies on the road to secularization would converge over time around secular-rational values, and diverge from the paths of societies with traditional values. I call this the comparative hypothesis of crisis because it locates the perception of a crisis of values in cross-cultural similarities and differences.

Note that both the trend and comparative hypotheses are indications of a crisis of values from a particular point of view—the traditionalist's view of the values inherent in a good society. From this perspective, loss of traditional values is cause for moral alarm, and cross-cultural comparison is unfavorable if it reveals that America's value system is different from that of societies with traditional values and similar to that of societies with secularized values. But the case could be made—and has been made, as I discuss in chapter 4—that secular-rational values are superior to and more desirable than tradi-

tional values. For example, secular-rational values may be considered freedom from the tyranny of religion, the triumph of reason over su-perstition, and the right to make personal choices about how to lead a good and virtuous life. By framing the trend and comparative hy-potheses from the traditionalist's view, I am not taking sides in the moral debate about America's crisis of values. Rather, I am express-ing the crisis in its own terms, that is, in the language and logics that prevail in discourse about America's crisis of values (such as in the sources cited in the section above).

The third way to think about the crisis of values is the division of society into opposed groups with irreconcilable moral differences. This view is expressed in the popular theory that America is engaged in a "culture war" between two opposed moral camps with incom-patible views of the American way of life. The strong form of the cul-ture war thesis contends that the outcome of the conflict will be the "domination of one cultural and moral ethos over all others."[36] Com-peting *moral visions* are the source of the presumed conflict. Moral visions reside over attitudes or religious values; they are fundamen-tal beliefs about the *location* of moral authority: the "transcenden-tal sphere" versus the "mundane sphere."[37] The former locates the source of moral values and moral judgment outside the self in God (religion) or society; the latter locates the source of moral values and moral judgment in the self. To use more popular terms, we can think of the two moral visions as *absolutism* versus *relativism*.

The culture war thesis presupposes the polarization of society into two opposed moral groups. "The polarization is most conspicuous in such hotly disputed issues as abortion, gay marriage, school vouch-ers, and prayers in public schools," says Gertrude Himmelfarb. "But it has larger ramifications, affecting beliefs, attitudes, values, and practices on a host of subject ranging from private morality to pub-lic policy, from popular culture to high culture, from crime to educa-tion, welfare, and the family."[38] Proponents of the polarization the-sis argue that it pervades all levels, from social attitudes to religion to the moral visions of absolutism versus relativism. If so, then we should observe two distinct groups based on differences in moral vi-sions, religious values, and social and political attitudes. I call this the

distribution hypothesis because it locates the perception of a crisis of values in the existence of a bimodal distribution of the American people.

Each hypothesis—crisis as loss of traditional values, crisis as unfavorable comparisons with other societies, or crisis as division into opposed groups—is distinct from the others but could operate in tandem. For example, there could be a shift away from traditional values (trend hypothesis) and convergence with rational-secular societies (comparative hypothesis), or a shift away from traditional values (trend hypothesis) for one part of society while the other part retains its traditional values, splitting America in two (distribution hypothesis). If at least one hypothesis were true, however, it would be a threat to the validity of the popular image of America as a national community.

Threats to America as an Imagined Community

A nation-state is an "imagined community."[39] It is the popular self-consciousness of belonging to a people. America, for example, is a nation-state in part because Americans imagine it so. This popular national self-consciousness, notes Jürgen Habermas, creates "a relation of solidarity between persons who had previously been strangers to one another."[40] Of course, most Americans are strangers interpersonally: The typical American (like the typical citizen of any nation-state) has personal relationships with or close interpersonal knowledge of only a small fraction of one's fellow citizens.[41] The "relation of solidarity" is not interpersonal; it is a creative act of the imagination. For all societies except America, the solidarity of a nation-state is rooted in common ancestry, language, religion, history, customs, traditions, and territory. This cultural heritage, says Habermas, produces "the consciousness of belonging to 'the same' people, and makes subjects into citizens of a single political community—into members who can feel responsible *for one another*. The nation of the *Volksgeist*, the unique spirit of the people—the first truly *modern* form of collective identity—provided the cultural basis for the con-

stitutional state."[42] National identity helped to solve the twin problems of legitimation and social integration. Historically, the legitimation problem arose from the loss of religion as the basis of the political authority of the state (e.g., the divine right of kings); the integration problem arose from the loss of social ties caused by economic modernization, urbanization, and geographic and occupational mobility.[43] The nation-state addressed these problems by using national identity as an abstract form of social integration and combining it with democratic participation. This process "generated a new level of legally mediated *solidarity* via the status of citizenship while providing the state with a secular source of *legitimation*."[44]

It follows that the absence of a common cultural heritage would impede the formation of a unified nation-state. For example, the creation of a European nation-state confronts this problem. A European self-consciousness would have to transcend the diverse cultural heritages of the European Union (EU) members.[45] Admitting new members in 2004—Slovenia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Lithuania, and others—aggravates the problem of integration. Not only are their cultural heritages quite different from those of the original EU members, but these differences are increasing. As I show elsewhere, the value systems of the original EU members and the new members are not converging. "In fact, there is a widening cultural divide that economic integration may not be able to overcome."[46]

The historic role of a common cultural heritage in the development of virtually every nation-state, along with the struggles of the EU to find an alternative mode of legitimation and form of social integration, illuminate the deviant case of the American nation-state. Observers from Alexis de Tocqueville onward have observed that America is deviant, "exceptional"—qualitatively different from other societies.[47] One qualitative difference is that the foundation of the imagined community of America is *not* a shared cultural heritage rooted in common ancestry, history, religion, language, and so on. Instead, the American nation is founded, as Habermas says, on "a civil religion."[48] "Born out of revolution," writes Lipset, "the United States is a country organized around an ideology which includes a set of dogmas about the nature of a good society. . . . As G. K. Chester-

ton put it: 'America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence. . . .'"[49] I discuss the details of "American exceptionalism" in other chapters; for now, the important point is that the imagined community of the United States is based on a set of *ideas* and *values* with as much legitimating and integrating force as religion.

It is this civil religion or ideology that is threatened by a loss of traditional values, unfavorable comparisons with other societies, or a split into opposed moral groups (the trend, comparative, and distribution hypotheses). Each is a threat to the imagined community of America; each undermines the American mode of legitimation and form of social integration. Indeed, the threat is greater for a society based on a cultural heritage of ideas than for one based on a cultural heritage of common ancestry, history, religion, and language. A crisis of values is a direct assault on the ideological core of the imagined community of America.

The crisis of values as a threat to America as an imagined community is a complement to Robert Putnam's thesis of the loss of "social capital" as the cause of the collapse of community.[50] Putnam focuses on only one side of the community question, as Amitai Etzioni notes in his criticism of Putnam's massive compendium of decline, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*.[51] Putnam's side is community as a social network of affect-laden relationships among people. For him, the American crisis is real, and it comes from falling levels of social and civic engagement—the actual disintegration of the social network. For example, Americans are participating in fewer voluntary associations, having fewer family dinners, socializing less often, voting less often, and even bowling alone rather than in leagues.

Putnam's "bowling alone" metaphor and social disintegration thesis have captured popular and media attention. Though Putnam's thesis and evidence have been called into question,[52] most of his critics concede he has a valid point.[53] But community is more than a social network, Etzioni argues; it is also a "commitment to a set of shared values, norms, and meanings."[54] The second side of commu-

nity is particularly important for America because a common ideology, rather than common ancestry, history, religion, and language, forms the foundation of the American imagined community. "Being an American," observes Lipset, "is an ideological commitment."[55] This book examines this second side of community: the extent to which Americans do or do not share the same values, norms, and meanings.

Taken together, Putnam's analysis of social capital and my analysis of values, norms, and meanings cover both sides of the community question. If I find evidence for at least one of the three hypotheses (trend, comparative, and distribution) and Putnam's thesis is correct, then America faces a double threat: the loss of the community's social bonds *and* the loss of the community's ideas. The widespread perception of crisis would be real.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter is an orientation to the widespread perception of a crisis of values in America and to the analysis in this book. After citing some of the main voices in the discourse about moral crisis, I presented an overview of three ways to think about a crisis of values: as a loss over time of traditional values (trend hypothesis), as an unfavorable comparison to other societies (comparative hypothesis), and as a division of society into opposed moral groups (distribution hypothesis). Finally, I introduced the concept of America as an "imagined community"—the popular self-consciousness of an American people. Unlike other nation-states, the American collective consciousness is not based on common ancestry, history, religion, and language; rather, it is based on a set of ideas—the American ideology or "civil religion." Given the ideological basis of American society, a crisis of values is especially threatening to the popular image of the nation as one community, creating a problem of legitimacy and a problem of social integration.

The next two chapters test the three hypotheses. These tests are a means to an end, not the end itself. That end is understanding.

Proper treatment of social problems follows proper diagnosis. As Joseph Nye writes in his introduction to *Why People Don't Trust Government*, "Many people are proposing a wide variety of remedies for the current discontent with government. But some remedies may prove feckless or even counterproductive unless we have a better understanding of causes."[56] Expand Nye's phrase "discontent with government" to include discontent with social, political, and economic institutions—that is, with American society itself—and we see the real reasons for investigating the origins and causes of a crisis of values.

Chapter 2, "America's Values in Global Context," tests the trend and comparative hypotheses, using data from multiple waves of the World Values Surveys. These surveys are the largest systematic attempt ever made to document attitudes, values, and beliefs around the world. As detailed in the appendix, these surveys include over sixty-five societies on all six inhabited continents, covering roughly 75 percent of the world's population. There are, of course, other sources of good data, and I use some of them here. However, for various reasons, these sources are less appropriate than the World Values Surveys for exploring the issues in this book.[57] The World Values Surveys provide an unprecedented opportunity to compare America's values with those of a wide range of societies, as well as to assess the loss of traditional values over time. As we shall see, America's value system exhibits both stability and change. Thus, this chapter concludes with a discussion of why some values change and others stay the same.

Chapter 3, "Culture War," tests the distribution hypothesis. While the unit of analysis in chapter 2 is the nation-state, here the unit of analysis is the individual. I examine the moral visions, religious beliefs, and social attitudes of the American people over time, using data from multiple waves of the World Values Surveys. I also discuss key findings from other studies of the culture war hypothesis, based on different sources of data. This chapter provides the most comprehensive empirical test of the culture war thesis yet available, examining the polarization of moral visions, religious-moral beliefs, and social attitudes, as well as the actual linkages across the three levels.

In addition, I go beyond the usual definition of the American culture war as a bimodal distribution of moral visions, beliefs, and attitudes to explore the connection between the two sides of community—shared values and social bonds. I investigate the link between moral visions and indicators of social capital: interpersonal trust, confidence in the nation's institutions, frequency of attendance at religious services, participation in voluntary organizations, and political action.

Chapter 4, "Dynamics of Crisis," provides a new interpretation of the perception of a crisis of values. I review some of the main theories used to explain patterns in America's political and religious history, including theories of political cycles, critical elections, critical realignments, the so-called Great Awakenings, and "supply side" explanations of religious change. I derive five propositions from this review, which are used to guide the interpretation. Unlike the previous chapters, this chapter is necessarily more speculative in nature. No opinion poll extends back far enough in time to test the interpretation. I believe the interpretation is reasonable because it is consistent with the five propositions I develop from the review, consistent with the empirical findings presented in chapters 2 and 3, and consistent with additional analyses of the survey data I conduct in this chapter to explore key points. The overall result explains why Americans perceive a widespread crisis of values.

Chapter 5, "The Search for Meaning," is the book's conclusion. I discuss America's unique mixed value system and some of the cultural contradictions it contains. I describe how Americans who have internalized the cultural contradictions of America's mixed value system experience cognitive dissonance—a personal experience of crisis caused by conflicting principles—and use this dissonance to stimulate thinking about the purpose and meaning of life. I examine some other expressions of the search for meaning in American life, such as rising spirituality and interest in the amalgamation of cultural elements known as the "New Age" movement. Next, I focus on the theme of absolutism in America, describing how this moral vision plays a special role in the preservation of the nation's imagined community. Without this role, it would appear as if the moral core of what

it means to be American had been lost—metaphorically, it would seem as if the nation had lost its guiding light. Finally, I assess the possibility of and obstacles to a synthesis of the cultural contradictions contained in the nation's mixed value system—an integration of opposites that would resolve the widespread perception of a crisis of values. The chapter ends with a summary of fifteen key findings from the empirical analyses presented throughout the book.

Appendix A contains detailed information about the World Values Surveys, sampling, and the measures used in this study. All tables with statistical results are provided in appendix B. Figures are presented in each chapter. All references are in the notes, which appear at the end of the book. Many notes contain substantive material, such as detailed discussion or amplification of points made in the text itself.