Liberal visions of multiculturalism and majoritarianism

A. Carl LeVan*

Department of Politics, Governance and Economics, American University, Washington, DC, United States

Liberalism advances democratic rights and representation through three principles. First, it seeks to protect individuals from abusive state power. Second, it shares an affinity with the epistemology of the Enlightenment, where an objective world can be discovered and observed. Third, it limits "tyranny of the majority" through civil liberties that counter the weight of public opinion and political rights that enable political competition of ideas. Rapidly evolving demands for recognition in the United States have advanced a broad critique of liberalism, highlighting the boundaries it imposes on representation as well as its limited success protecting rights. This essay traces disenchantment with liberalism to two very different sources: first, many progressives who resent how the jurisprudence of equal opportunity obscures efforts to achieve *actual* equality reject "anonymity" under the law—removing a core civil rights principle for promoting fairness. Such demands for more explicit rights and representation conflict with the majoritarian model's application of liberalism, which biases cultural assimilation over multicultural integration. Movements for recognition increasingly challenge both assimilation and the institutional devices of multicultural integration. The other source of tension around recognition comes from the right, where populists have set out to revive nativist ideas of coerced assimilation or outright homogenization through exclusion (ie, *non-recognition*). Such failures of representation have promoted subjectivist views as a credential for contesting facts. The paper argues for "pluralist solidarity" as a tool for reconciling multiculturalism with new rights and demands for recognition emanating from liberalism's traditions of individual liberty. This device aims to help separate the quest for recognition and dignity from the subjectivity that contributes to post-truth politics.

KEYWORDS

liberalism, democracy, American political culture, post-truth, presidential election, multiculturalism, American politics, political theory and history of ideas

Introduction

Modern democracy sprang from liberalism, a philosophy that seeks to expand human freedom through rights, reason, and the dignity of the individual. This tradition, rooted in the Western experience though hardly limited to it, mediates the relationship between the people and the government by imposing limits on government power and providing civil and political rights. It plays a critical role in implementing the majoritarian democratic model and guarding against its excesses. In particular, it fosters competition by limiting the majority's ability to act with corporate will against the minority or to drown out its various voices. Liberalism also offers a path to knowledge compatible with democratization. "Scientific knowledge can save us," wrote Isaiah Berlin. "This is the fundamental doctrine of the French

Enlightenment, a great liberating movement which in its day eliminated a great deal of cruelty, superstition, injustice and obscuritanism" (Berlin, 1990, 34). But without doubt and tolerance, this liberal vision can also dangerously conflate freedom with faith in an empirically coherent world and a desire to master it.

A global wave of autocratization has cast doubt on liberalism's relevance for rights across many corners of the globe. According to the Varieties of Democracy Project, by 2022, democratic backsliding and autocratization had erased all of the hard-won democratic gains from the previous 35 years. As a result, 72% of the world's population now lives under some form of illiberal governance. The threat to democracy in America came home on January 6 when insurrectionists organized around an alternative, socially constructed reality where Joe Biden stole the 2020 election. In this "post-truth" narrative, rights were being taken away and reason had been hijacked by progressive, urban elites. One third of Americans and two-thirds of Republicans still dispute the 2020 outcome (Monmouth University, 2023). Liberalism has also strained shared ideals of democratic community as its ideals of liberty and individual autonomy have enabled divisive politicizations of identity. Personal self-expression also carries expectations for civic membership, meaning that some public claims on personhood are reasonable for some Americans and contentious for others.

In this essay, I describe protection from the state, minority rights, and an epistemology rooted in reason as three foundations of liberalism, and trace today's rival visions of America to competing understandings of liberal nationhood. On the one hand, a politics of identity sees the political and civil rights of individuals as inherently connected to an autonomously determined and freely formed sense of self. Since liberalism demands that individuals have the right articulate who they are and the communities they belong to, "identity politics" are a logical extension of liberalism. But movements advancing these claims often presume that personal identity and political representation should overlap whenever possible, despite America's majoritarian constitutional model that explicitly limits such possibilities.

A competing vision of liberal nationhood once rested on a myth of "benign assimilation." In the popular "melting pot" metaphor, people voluntarily blend in because they aspire to do so, though this optimistic view of cultural integration acknowledged that self-expression as civic drawbacks. A reactionary, authoritarian populism has reintroduced coercive elements of a melting pot and legitimized policies and ideals of cultural homogenization. In this distorted vision of liberalism, citizenship thrives on a nationalist narrative of exclusion, rationalized by a revisionist history and a nativist mythology of migration. It traffics in cultural backlash against gays, women, and non-conforming genders but is especially united against immigrants. "You look at what is marching up, that is an invasion!" said President Trump at a political rally. A gunman who killed 20 people in El Paso echoed this crude characterization of migration, declaring "This attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas" (Baker and Shear, 2019). I explain how this reactionary populism denies distinctions between voluntary migration and involuntary migration, much of which has roots cold war foreign policies and neoliberal economics. This vision of liberalism was propelled by the marriage of culture wars (over everything from MTV to the definition of the family) and the economic conservatism offered by neoliberalism: privatization, a smaller state, deregulation and trade without tariffs or other perceived barriers. (By the 1990s, Steger and Roy (2010) note this economic

template was reviled in the developing world by social movements and political leaders alike—even as those leaders implemented those same policies without the brand name).

I outline a "pluralist solidarity" of integration that preserves diversity by resisting assimilation while addressing concerns about weakening the nation raised by critics of identity politics. This approach to identity builds from the political theory of multiculturalism. Recognition with integration does bring risks, as the means of fragmenting the nation could exceed the bond uniting it. However, the ambitions of a tolerant and culturally diverse nation can—and in practical terms must—be squared with our majoritarian model. This can begin by acknowledging liberalism's limits within multiculturalist aspirations, and taking stock of its successes safeguarding liberty. We may not have the ideal constitution, but our shared liberal roots do point toward a constitutional idealism that can hear the signal of solidarity amidst the noise of pernicious partisan divides.

Liberalism's shared foundations and its rival legacies

Liberalism stands on three foundations. First, it protects people from abuses of state power. Some of liberalism's oldest roots derive from Thomas Hobbes, who thought that people also needed to be protected from each other. To eliminate this condition of fear and mutual mistrust, people therefore willingly surrender a portion of their freedom to a "Leviathan." The Declaration of Independence and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights however suggest that sovereignty flows from the people, who are the best guarantors of their freedom. "I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical," wrote Thomas Jefferson to James Madison in 1787. Unjust authority is illegitimate authority, even if people must occasionally be protected from each other. This kind of freedom has enabled strong notions of autonomy, with laws reverently guarding an ethic of choice. Voting is the most obvious manifestation—the mechanism through which citizens privately choose their public leaders. Since the Civil Rights movements of the Twentieth Century, it has come to include expanding horizons of self-expression as well. Placing people philosophically prior to government has strained the collective and cultural implications of individual rights.

Second, liberalism balances the principles of majority rule with minority rights. Majoritarianism risks oppression in different ways. For example, America's Single Member District plurality electoral system disempowers electoral losers—no matter how narrow the loss. Critics thus commonly refer to this approach to majoritarian democracy as "winner take all," since the loser effectively lacks representation (Lijphart, 1999). Majoritarian can also breed oppression through the weight of public opinion, drowning out minority votes or voices. "When society itself is the tyrant," wrote J. S. Mill, the tyranny of the majority is "more formidable than many kinds of political oppression" (Mill, 1978, 4). The competition of ideas and interests promote the temporary nature of political power, preventing minority voices from being drowned in the din of democracy. A free society needs, "protection against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling," thought Mill (ibid). In this tradition, civil liberties advance individual freedom by subverting hierarchy. In

in doing so, the *individualism* that fosters liberty can also weaken the bonds of community, our basis for solidarity. Tocqueville offered the most eloquent articulation of this concern, distinguishing between selfishness as a "passionate and exaggerated love of self" which "is born of blind instinct," and individualism which proceeds from "erroneous judgment unleashed by democracy's equality of conditions" (Tocqueville, Tocqueville et al., 2000, 482–3).

Finally, liberalism shares an affinity with the epistemology of Enlightenment. The world is discoverable and knowable. In the eyes of Immanuel Kant, freedom under representative government awakens people to the use of reason, a shared experience in a public sphere. The earth revolves around the sun, and women who float in water are not witches. Reason buried superstition. However, this accommodated belief in the mastery over nature a view challenged by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who associated our entry into society with an errancy from nature, where truth resides. The mind, and therefore reason, cannot be trusted because it pulls us away from our natural abilities. Reflecting on this potential for deception, Isaiah Berlin worried more that reason carried through to its end would undermine freedom. A return to "lost innocence" to find truth in nature amounts to an "infantile and dangerous delusion," a craving for uniformity. Reason invites utopianism, he feared, a belief that "the final solution to all ills" exists, and if it can be achieved then no cost is too high. "This conviction gives a wide license to inflict suffering on other men" (Berlin, 1990, 47). Liberalism may offer an equilibrium of sorts to limit this. But the awe-inspiring belief in a harmonious, empirically unified, scientific future is overwhelmingly seductive.

In today's divided and polarized America, left and the right make competing claims on liberalism's foundations. Conservatives on the right see the expansion of government's role, especially during the 20th Century, as a dire threat to liberalism's first foundation. Government spending to reduce poverty through Social Security, or to provide health care through Medicare, undermines the private sector by giving the government an unfair competitive advantage and driving up taxes, which deter private investment, corporate hiring, and innovation. Taking cues from John Locke, economic development requires incentives for individuals to profit from the fruits of their work and their ideas. "The condition of Humane Life, which requires Labor and Materials to work on, necessarily introduces private Possessions," he writes in *The Second Treatise on Government* (Locke, 1988, 35). An underlying goal, especially for the political right's libertarian tradition, is to protect people *from* the government. This expansive view of personal liberty extends to regulations as well, whether they aim to limit lead in Michigan's water, mandate inspections of navigation systems in one of Boeing's crashed airplanes, or keep guns out of the hands of individuals with terrorist ties. In Locke's terms, the purpose of law is to be free from others rather than restrained from above.

For the left, the government acts more like a guardian of freedom. By expanding suffrage to African-Americans then women, liberalism corrects the defects of the constitution using the force of its own logic. Through laws and the courts, the government should protect equal rights to participate in the economic, political and social life of the nation. Barriers to equality stem from flawed institutions that exist in social contexts, rather than mere failures of individual effort or an absence of virtue. Advancing freedom therefore means reforming those institutions that abuse state power by denying justice or equality to some. The Black Lives Matter movement for example demanded correctives for a pervasive pattern of police abuse. (Those who flirted

with demands to "defund" the police, such as Washington, DC's mayor, have notably backtracked, returning to more conventional reforms). Progressive taxation, a robust minimum wage or a guaranteed income, and universal access to social services all seek to offset structural imbalances; active intervention against discrimination in its many forms aim to deliver on the Declaration of Independence's unfulfilled promises.

In liberalism's second foundation, against tyranny of the majority, the political right often sees overcompensation for the minority. Affirmative action, rather than serving as a remedy for past injustices or as an intervention to create equal opportunity where none existed, undermines merit. Hate crimes take already proscribed behavior and single it out for differential punishment if designated categories of people are affected. This approach to rights inspires disputes about both the motives of perpetrators as well as the relevance of categories themselves. Recent court cases over school bathrooms cynically illustrate the latter. An issue is whether the discrimination based on sex in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (and Education Amendments of 1972) extends to transgender people. "I do not have a problem sharing a bathroom with someone who identifies as transgender—provided they are the same sex I am," said a plaintiff in one case. "I do have trouble with a policy that says anyone who's in an opposite-sex mood today can stroll in and observe me in my intimate moments" (Buono, 2018).

The "Alt-Right," by constructing an expansive critique of what Sarah Palin called "the lamestream media," leveraged liberalism in a different way by positioning conservative views as minority views—an interpretation that persisted even after Trump became president. In this vein, universities are critiqued as bastions of biased liberalism, and innovations in self-description from ethnic or gender minorities are denounced as "political correctness," the tyranny of a minority empowered to change language and behavioral norms without a broader social consensus.

The left sees liberalism's second foundation crumbling for entirely different reasons. The Electoral College, corrupts any reasonable democratic estimation of citizens' views. Those views are also drowned out by making money a form of constitutionally protected speech, first with the Supreme Court case *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976) and later with *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010) allowing unlimited corporate spending. One study using thousands of survey questions over more than two decades finds that money (or at least wealth) systematically generates policy bias: "when Americans with different income levels differ in their preferences, actual policy outcomes strongly reflect the preferences of the most affluent but bear virtually no relationship to the preferences of middle-income Americans" (Gilens, 2005). In short, policy makers are more responsive to the interests of wealthy Americans, and Supreme Court decisions ensure that money can speak for them.

The differential responsiveness of government follows from differences in representation. Voter identification laws that disproportionately disenfranchise low income or ethnic minority voters, much like partisan gerrymandering tilts the political playing field rather than forging a shared pathway to the common good. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, 11 percent of American citizens lack identification, with rates even higher among African Americans. The General Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, estimates that voter ID laws suppress turnout by 2–3 percent and they disproportionately discourage minority voter

turnout. Research further shows that such laws generally benefit conservative candidates (Government Accountability Office, 2014; Hajnal et al., 2017).

The left also sees achieving freedom for individuals as inextricable from the categories to which they belong—and which they should be permitted to assign themselves. Martin Luther King dreamed of people "not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Yet this vision of equality was hardly an endorsement of post-racialism. Instead, diversity required public consciousness of difference. Justice Harry Blackmun in the Supreme Court case upholding Affirmative Action (but overturning quotas), wrote "in order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way. And in order to treat some persons equally, we must treat them differently" (U.S. Supreme Court, 1978, 407).

Finally, one might think that ways of knowing inherited from the Enlightenment would generate few divisions. Yet liberalism's third pillar faces attacks for very different reasons from the left and the right. For those seeking to expand recognition through discrete or descriptive representation, the limited success of universal rights can be attributed to the inability of anonymity under the law to "see" different experiences. These "lived experiences" form the basis of a new way of knowing, where objectivity is merely a mythology of power and privilege. There's evidence that "standpoint epistemology," as a proposed corrective, has ironically contributed to actual harm and undermined recognition of scientists from minority backgrounds (Abbot et al., 2023). Empires should not be entitled to write history, and when dominant ethnicities or genders produce policy, they at best miscalculate the common good and at worst perpetuate marginalization. Subjectivity expands interpretations and identifies new questions and the hidden shoals of power. At the same time, the left has yet to fully reconcile the need to correct bias, often uncovered by previously excluded voices, with historical commitments to knowledge that stands apart from the observer—and therefore offers a basis for communities of shared understandings. From the right, post-truth politics festered in a polarized decline of trust in scientific authority. During a pandemic that killed over 1.2 million Americans, Republicans disproportionately refused to wear masks, get vaccinated or defer to medical experts (LeVan et al., 2024). Expertise itself was imbued with a perceived liberal elitism at the center of a new "anti-intellectual" movement (Barker et al., 2022). In short, scientific claims to objectivity concealed a partisan agenda rife with conspiracy. This is the converse of how some progressives now see objectivity as an instrument of oppression by disguising bias, prompting a number of academic journals to request "positionality statements" to disclose the ethnicity or race of the author.

Historically the left's critique of science arose from ethics. The atomic bomb emerged not from *how* we know things but rather *why* we want to know them—a lesson Robert Oppenheimer absorbed from Reinhold Niebur too late. At the peak of the anti-nuclear movement, with SANE/FREEZE and their activist coalition partners leading to the (then) largest demonstration in American history, Democrats were more skeptical about science than Republicans. But importantly, this centered on an ethical, not an epistemological, critique of science. The bomb symbolized a metaphorical desire to master nature (rather than live within it, as Rousseau proposed), and in this regard the left now struggles to cohere around ethical sources to guide the pursuit of knowledge; the rise of secularism has opened an ethical void. Through voices such as Naomi Klein, it stands behind the science of climate

change, embracing ecology in order to bring humanity into harmony with nature rather than standing over it. This is on much safer grounds than the left's historic flirtations with communism, which was prone to precisely the sort of authoritarian traps Berlin identified in reason's hidden pathways, where belief in a unifying theory offering a coherent whole is a temptation to totalitarianism. But in its worthy efforts to amplify marginalized voices, the left has complicated its relationship with objectivity and undermined its ability to shape larger public opinion on the issues that matter most to decency and democracy.

The right has wholly embraced mastery over nature, through Republican demands for "fracking" and offshore oil drilling and Trump's nostalgic call for a return to coal—despite the fact that technology enables more extraction with fewer workers (thus clearly going again to the question of *why* we need a particular technology). Through this ideological lens, the lesson of the industrial revolution is that nature must be subordinated to development and economic growth. The empirical justification for another way might exist, but Locke's liberalism and Twentieth Century neoliberalism must prevail. As Hayek put it, democracy must not be permitted to stand in the way of capitalism, while the Bible readily provides the ethical rationale by pointing out how God told man to master his environment.

These above dualities are obviously heuristics. The left for example includes progressives who support democratic socialism as well Democratic centrists in Bill Clinton's mold. The right includes neoconservatives, who unlike libertarians, desire a strong state because they want to project power. It also includes traditional conservatives, who take cues from Edmund Burke's suspicions of change, and who in the post-war years opposed new functions for government or regulation of economic life. But they do clearly illustrate how these competing understandings of liberalism have contributed to an America divided against itself, which the next section traces to rival visions of nationhood.

Liberalism's nations

Competing liberalisms manifest in increasingly different myths of national identity, enshrined in radically different citizenship regimes. A central point of divergence begins over what to do about multiculturalism, as a reality and as an ideal, and as a way of capturing norms; borders are social as much as they are political. A conventional understanding of multiculturalism celebrated diversity but struggles to reconcile the individualism of liberalism with community and civic identity. This "benign" multiculturalism rejects coercion but has left unresolved pain generated by integration. Next, it's worth pointing out how conservatives accepted multiculturalism with a presumption of assimilation, while voices in the civil rights tradition carved out space for integration as a compromise with liberalism. A backlash against multiculturalism came in various forms, including new prejudices against immigrants and Donald Trump's crude questioning of Kamala Harris's ethnic self-identification. Liberalism may unleash the ability to define oneself, but in doing so progressives also must better answer a call to explain what brings us together.

As a political *theory,* the definition of multicultural departs from the colloquial understanding in a few ways. For example, in Will Kymlicka's influential approach begins by noting the need to reconcile individual rights generated by liberalism with a (potentially contradictory) respect for a person's group attachments. An important

premise in his approach is that self-identification, as an exercise in individual autonomy, always has public implications. For example, it is inescapable that the government will have to choose a language (or several, as in countries such as South Africa) for official communication and codification of its social boundaries. Multiculturalism emphasizes the value of inclusion and liberal protections for those the state does not explicitly recognize. Whereas liberalism traditionally protects individual rights universally and neutrally regardless of descriptors, this definition of multiculturalism attempts to move beyond the "anonymity" of rights to accommodate group identities.

In this classic formulation of multiculturalism, Kymlicka also distinguishes between ethnic communities that migrated voluntarily, but want to continue practicing their culture ore religion. Governments can and should accommodate them as a means of integration, but with an implied bargain: having voluntarily left their homeland, these immigrants abandon claims to group autonomy. When they ask for exceptions, such as when Muslim women in France choose to wear a veil, the demands must somehow prove compatible with liberal rights (Spinner-Halev, 2016). America has grappled with these issues since its founding. Walt Whitman articulated the more tolerant vision for America, saying it "will stand opposed to everything which means restriction—stand against all policies of exclusion: accept Irish, Chinese—knowing it must not question the logic of its hospitality," wrote Walt Whitman of the early waves of immigrants (Whitman, 2019). Kymlicka therefore sees America as a bold experiment in cultural accommodation and political representation. "The idea of building a country through polyethnic immigration was quite unique in history, and many people thought it untenable. There were no historical precedents to show that an ethnically mixed country of immigrants could be stable" (Kymlicka, 1995, 61). America, like many other democracies, also had an indigenous population. These "national minorities" share a distinct language and culture that forms a "more or less institutionally complete" community, according to Kymlicka. But they also have strong territorial bonds, and therefore have stronger claims to subnational autonomy, which America *partly* accommodates through federalism. For example, reservations have their own police forces, can levy their own taxes and organize their own elections. Most importantly, the federal government interacts with them on a "government-to-government" basis, recognizing a principle of sovereignty. This vision of multiculturalism aims to let diversity and communal liberty flourish, supposedly fostering inclusion and integration while squarely rejecting the coercion and racism of Theodore Roosevelt. (As president, he deployed the Dawes Act to forcibly relocate Native Americans, many of whom died in the process, and rejected Apache pleas for mercy following their defeat).

A rival liberal notion of nationhood embraces a "melting pot" metaphor for America that can be characterized as "benign assimilation." A political commitment to citizenship here presumes acculturation—that people who identify with another place commit to the patriotic obligations as well as the cultural myths of their new home. This notion of liberalism can find roots in John Stewart Mill's concept of "common sympathies" to capture the affinity people feel for one another. Citizens hold attachment to national identity by sharing language, religion, or geography. "But the strongest of all is identity of political antecedents; the possession of a national history, and consequent community of recollections; collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the

same incidents of the past" (Mill, 1890, 308). From this perspective, cultural assimilation facilitates (and perhaps prioritizes) political stability. Mill did not imply racial singularity though. Instead, there needed to simply be a strongly shared commitment to the nation and its mutually constructed identity. In arguing for assimilation, Sam Huntington worried that America's legal permanent residents, who made up 5 % of the armed forces at the time of 9/11, were missing the requisite political antecedents for Mill's common sympathies. "Without a major war requiring substantial mobilization and lasting years," he wrote, "contemporary immigrants will have neither the opportunity nor the need to affirm their identity and loyalty to America as earlier immigrants have done" (Huntington, 2004, 199).

Quite aside from war, other social shifts have promoted assimilation. Within two generations, most American immigrant families hear their children speak with limited knowledge of the language of their ancestors. (This is precisely one of the outcomes that multiculturalism strives to reduce). The rate of inter-racial and inter-ethnic marriage offers another compelling benchmark. In 1970, only 3 percent of unions could be described this way, but by 2017, 17 percent of all marriages were across race or ethnicity. Notably, this accompanied positive changes in public attitudes, with 39 percent of Americans—an increase of 15 percentage points over 7 years—saying that marrying someone of a different race is *good* for society (Livingston and Brown, 2017). Such data would seem to suggest a basis for "successful" assimilation. Like the amicable songs and images in the Schoolhouse Rock children's cartoons that Generation X'ers grew up on (now streaming on Disney+), the melting pot implies voluntary cultural adoption and adaptation.

Huntington's position, essentially conservative in the most ordinary ways, could find common ground with moderate Republicans who accepted (or tolerated) immigrants and refugees as long as they lived up to the expectations for citizenship as a legal *and* cultural construct. As a candidate, Ronald Reagan called America a "city on a hill" and praised the "millions of immigrants from every corner of the earth." As president he even signed into law a bill granting legal status to three million immigrants already in the country (DeParle, 2019). Senator Lindsay Graham also embodied this conventional conservative understanding of immigration when he said if America turns away families fleeing Syria's war, then we should "take the Statue of Liberty and tear it down…because we do not mean it anymore" (Troyan, 2015).

The reactionary populism embodied by Donald Trump rejects assimilation outright in favor of exclusion. The Reagan Republicans have been replaced by a corrupted Millian narrative of cultural pride and imagined shared humiliation that inspires open racial animus. It has roots in mainstream thinkers like Huntington. But the right's transition from the benign assimilation of the melting pot to white nationalism follows a thread of conservative interpretations of liberalism's legacies, which exploded as backlash against structural and cultural shifts in society. Right wing commentators such as Tucker Carlson repeatedly invoke fears of white replacement. "Their political success does not depend on good policies but on demographic replacement, and they'll do anything to make sure it happens," he said of Democrats (Carlson, 2017). "They want the illegal immigrants, and they want the flood," said talk radio host Rush Limbaugh (Limbaugh, 2019). "They want invasion because they do not like America, and they want to

restructure America and erase all aspects of the founding." This populism has united foreign policy isolationism with the white nationalist project of enforced exclusion, abandoning any liberal presumptions of assimilation.

How liberalism led the right to reject assimilation and embrace exclusion

An important moment in the conventional conservative relationship with liberalism's ideals of tolerance began with the Civil Rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s. These movements practiced new forms of participation through protests, sit-ins, and civil disobedience, directly challenging authority in ways readymade for televisions recently purchased by the middle class. Conservatives such as William F. Buckley were appalled. "People should hold fast to custom and tradition, limiting change," Anne Norton explains in her study of the right. "Conservatives praised the cultivation of moral virtues and ethical discipline. They praised the dignified, disciplined and elegant bearing of those who kept their emotions in check" (Norton, 2005, 170). For the remainder of the century, conservativism cohered around attacks on "big government," rhetoric at home within liberalism's first foundation. Their insistence that racism or economic inequality should be addressed through individual responsibility rather than institutions was similarly situated within liberalism's second foundation; the citizen is already armed with rights to protect herself from the crudeness or the rudeness of the crowd while myths of merit explained away pervasive inequality.

As women, gays and various minorities expressed their political demands through socially distinct identities, the 60s and 70s reshaped struggles over rights and representation. After the Stonewall riot in 1969, gay rights were increasingly attached to civil rights. And women's sexual revolution unfurled new gender demographics and dynamics. In 1965 the Supreme Court guaranteed access to contraception, even for unmarried people, in *Griswold v. Connecticut*. Women could delay marriage, exercise more choice over when (and whether) they wanted to have children; liberalism meant "women's lib." This further enabled women to pursue work outside the home, and actually enjoy sex in its own right.

Kymlicka and others see the grievances of these "new social movements" as wholly warranted, but outside the scope of the model of multicultural citizenship. Crawford Young famously grapples with that issue in *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism.* He argues that a surge of interest in ethnicity during the 1960s began to erode the mutual compatibility of nation and state in post-war liberalism. Revisiting the essay after the end of the Cold War, extending it beyond the developing world to the former Soviet states and western democracies, he concluded "the potent force of politicized and mobilized cultural pluralism is now universally conceded" (Young, 1993, 3). For historically oppressed groups, such as African Americans, this created political space for mainstreaming Black history or Latinx (Hispanic) culture into school curricula, popular literature, and national consciousness. For newer immigrants, it became easier and more acceptable to form public associations to retain their heritage. Proponents of assimilation such as Huntington loosely contrasted this with the experience of pre-World War I immigrants, who were supposedly inspired and equipped to assimilate through civil society organizations that strengthened their attachments to a more singular

American identity. Assimilation, he wrote, "particularly cultural assimilation, has been a great, possibly the greatest, American success story" (Huntington, 2004, 183).

By contrast, John Dewey maintained that "hyphenism" was precisely the "national spirit of America," a way of advancing an ethnically diverse democracy as long as each community did not isolate itself (falling prey to a kind of Tocquevillian individualism) (See Menand, 2002, 391–400). Early 20th Century attempts to act upon Dewey's ideas typically struggled though. For example, German immigrants agitated for "language pluralism" for their 11 million strong community in America (a fight they swiftly lost after World War I broke out). Demands for language accommodation were more successful by the 1990s, with many state and local governments responding to new diversity by exercising powers of federalism (Schmidt, 1993). In Washington, DC, for example, the city translates official materials into six different languages. There are thirteen public schools teaching a "dual-language" model, in which all or part of the school day is taught in a foreign language. Whereas bilingual education aims to facilitate assimilation into the dominant language, this alternative seeks to make children proficient in multiple languages. Even smaller cities have embraced a multicultural approach to public services and civic identity, working with ethnic-specific civic organizations such as those that formed in Lewiston, Maine after a wave of Somali refugees arrived—reviving and contributing to the town (Besteman, 2016).

Intellectuals such as William Bennett view multiculturalism and language accommodation through Burkean conservativism, further lamenting declines in marriage rates and the "loss" of the "traditional" family. In this tradition, Newt Gingrich blamed the 1960s for everything from murder to poverty. After leading the Republicans to electoral victory in 1994, he characterized Bill and Hillary Clinton as archetypes of a 1960s counter-culture, saying there were "profound things wrong" with the Great Society (created by President Lyndon Johnson to expand access to social services). He decried America's descent since the 1950's into "a culture which is extraordinarily tolerant of violence, with a situation-ethics morality" (Dowd, 1994). Multiculturalism and language pluralism were derided as partners in cultural relativism, the idea from anthropology that cultures should be viewed in their own terms rather than judged in comparison to each other. This undermines assimilation by subverting an aspirational Americanism with English as the official language. A movement to make English the official language in America, pursued by Gingrich's revolutionaries under legislation entitled "The English Language Empowerment Act," mocked academic research on African American dialects and trafficked in racist tropes. Conservatives constructed influential myths of acculturation and assimilation, as when Dinesh D'Souza proclaimed "the end of racism" in 1995. Republican revolutionaries lost the fight for "English Only," and failed to enact most of Gingrich's "Contract with America." But the movement strengthened the conservative ideological bond between traditional positions on deficit spending or government regulation with the culture wars.

Those "wars" were supercharged by demographic shifts, including the diminishing share of white Americans, and a conservative backlash against changing norms. Across 32 countries including the US, Norris and Inglehart document generational shift to more politically liberal values. Compared to baby boomers or the aging interwar generation, millennials and other young Americans are more

tolerant of homosexuality, abortion, divorce, and pre-marital sex, and more supportive of "post-material" values such as environmental protection. Changing attitudes on gay marriage are particularly striking. Gallup surveys regularly ask, "Do you think marriages between same-sex couples should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?" In 1996, only 27 percent of Americans said the marriages should be valid and 68 percent said they should not be. By 2023, in less than a generation, the proportions were flipped, with 71 percent saying same-sex marriage should be valid and only 28 percent saying not (Gallup, 2023).

These changing values, perceived as a swing in favor of multiculturalism, contributed to a backlash that Trump rode to victory in 2016. The evidence suggests this was only one part of the cultural backlash though. One study found no evidence "that legalization of gay marriage (by any means) leads to increased opposition to gay marriage or intensity of feelings about the gay marriage issue by the general public or by any group." Based on a model of randomized control trials that sorted 2,400 test subjects into five different conditions based on survey questions, it concludes that legalization or court decisions in favor of same sex marriage made the public somewhat *more* accepting and tolerant of the idea (Bishin et al., 2016). Even the 2015 Supreme Court ruling on same sex marriage did little to increase negative attitudes, suggesting the backlash was modest.

There is good evidence that attitudes towards immigrants contributed more to a cultural backlash. Norris and Inglehart study the relationship between anti-immigrant sentiment and support for authoritarian populism. Then, comparing these attitudes with more "instrumental" concerns about competition for jobs or mistrust of elites, they conclude in "the 2016 United States election, white working-class fears of cultural replacement and immigration were more powerful factors in predicting support for Trump than economic concerns" (Norris and Inglehart, 2019, 191–2) (The results hold in Europe too, where in two-thirds of the countries, fears about the negative impact of immigration on culture far exceed concerns about newcomers on jobs, wages or benefits).

In sum, the American left increasingly sees backlash against immigrants, gay rights or gender identity as part of the same attack on liberalism's foundations, which have extended multicultural principles to new communities. When Stacey Abrams ran for governor of Georgia in 2018, she argued that when inclusion of any marginalized peoples leads to backlash, "the natural antidote to this condition is not a retrenchment to amorphous, universal descriptors devoid of context or nuance. Instead, Americans must thoughtfully pursue an expanded, identity-conscious politics. New, vibrant, noisy voices represent the strongest tool to manage the growing pains of multicultural coexistence" (Abrams, 2019). A new generation of progressives demand a liberalism with descriptors that replaces the anonymity of rights with affirmations of self-expression. For their part, traditional conservatives believe such categories undermine liberalism's path to individual liberty. Conservatism "tries to present itself as a color-blind and individualist philosophy," writes Hawley in his study of the right. "When it attacks groups and individuals that lobby for racial causes, conservatives usually argue that they are against identity politics as such. That is, they oppose all forms of racial or ethnic collectivism and solidarity, regardless of the group and its constituents" (Hawley, 2019, 160). Both understandings have been ill prepared to confront the

increasingly violent, un-American mythology of America, doubtful of assimilation and opposed to tolerant, multicultural co-existence.

From assimilation to exclusion and homogenization

In the United States, reactionary populism stands for a new nationalist narrative that unites a domestic longing for cultural homogenization and economic nostalgia, with a foreign policy premised on exclusion and unilateralism. Diversity generated by immigrants, refugees, gays or Muslims all undermine an idealized white, Christian nation. For the Alt-right that has propelled Trump, only exclusion can make America great again. This is the first prong of an attack on assimilation. It reconstructs cultural myths, advancing a revisionist history that sees coercion as either just or not at all. Studies have long associated this type of populism with anti-immigrant attitudes and widespread frustration that political elites tolerate too much diversity (Taggart, 2004). A second prong rejects the very premise of assimilation by treating distinctions between voluntary and involuntary migration as immaterial. This is important since a growing share of global migration is involuntary. About 100 million people have been *forced* to flee their homes in recent years, according to the United Nations. This matters for multiculturalism, since traditionally the theory places *voluntary* migration at the heart of its integrationist bargain: we accept you, and in return we expect you to embrace certain civic obligations and cultural ideals.

Policies intended to exclude rather than assimilate begin first by denying involuntary migration and omitting its structural drivers rooted in geopolitics. Migrants from Central America today are fleeing poverty and violence with deep roots in a century of American intervention and decades of Cold War proxy battles. Throughout the 1980s, the US covertly supported the contras in their failed effort to overthrow the government of Nicaragua, and backed brutal governments in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala that adopted an instrumental anti-communism. According to the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), in 2023 alone U.S. authorities encountered 2.8 million migrants from Central America and Venezuela, the vast majority of whom are seeking asylum.

When the Cold War ended, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) embodied a new policy tool that under an optimistic guise of economic integration. It explicitly promised to lift Mexico's economy through open trade, while implicitly it reshaped multiculturalism by privileging economic integration over cultural integration: globalization would entail free movement of goods but not people. Donald Trump seized upon this as an inconsistency, identifying the free movement of either goods *or* people as national threats, imposing tariffs on China and attacking NAFTA. To that end he refused to spend (or reprogrammed) over half a billion dollars of aid that the Republican controlled Congress had appropriated for Central America in 2017 and 2018. WOLA noted the apparent paradox for a president opposed to migration, saying "Central Americans should not need to leave Central America." But without an American commitment to rebuild the world it damaged, vulnerable populations facing hunger and massive violence no choice but to flee (Isaacson, 2019).

Trump's rhetoric thus moved the critique of multiculturalism from assimilation to exclusion, legitimizing even more radical calls for

cultural homogenization. "They are not our friend, believe me," Donald Trump said of Mexicans when he announced his presidential campaign. "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (Lerner, 2015). Just months earlier, a major scientific study had concluded quite the opposite: increased prevalence of immigrants, over time and across America, is associated with *lower* crime rates. Among men ages 18–34 in particular, foreign-born people are incarcerated at one-fourth the rate of native-born Americans, with the rates between the different groups leveling out by the second or third generation (National Academy of Sciences, 2015). Trump's policy on the southern border also separated hundreds of children from their parents, stripping the Republican Party of its rhetorical association with "family values" since George H.W. Bush and inspiring a rare critique from evangelicals. Ruling against the policy, one judge said, "The unfortunate reality is that under the present system, migrant children are not accounted for with the same efficiency and accuracy as property" (ShearJulie et al., 2018).

For both the cultural narrative of nationhood and in terms of policy, a characterization of migrants' motivations devoid of political and structural drivers recasts all migrants as global parasites, willingly fleeing their "mud huts" (to use Trump's colorful language describing Nigerian homes). "Give me your tired and your poor who can stand on their own 2 feet and who will not become a public charge," said Trump's top official for citizenship and immigration, in a comment sharply contrasting with Senator Graham's Statue of Liberty imagery (Ingber and Martin, 2019). Legal and administrative distinctions between immigrant and refugee dissolve into one migrant who dreams of leeching off the prosperity of white, working class, America. "They're poisoning the blood of our country. That's what they have done," said candidate Trump in 2023. "They poison—mental institutions and prisons all over the world. Not just in South America. Not just the three or four countries that we think about. But all over the world they are coming into our country—from Africa, from Asia, all over the world" (Blake, 2023).

Among migrants, Muslims are seen as especially incompatible with the melting pot of benign assimilation. Trump fabricated a claim that Muslims in New Jersey celebrated the 9/11 attacks. After the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, he said he would "strongly consider," shutting down mosques in the U.S. "Some of the absolute hatred is coming from these areas….The hatred is incredible. It's embedded. The hatred is beyond belief. The hatred is greater than anybody understands." In an interview with CNN, he said, "I think Islam hates us," adding his objection was to radical Islam specifically, but "it's very hard to define. It's very hard to separate. Because you do not know who's who" (Gregory, 2015; Blumberg, 2017). As president, he then declared a ban on travel from predominantly Muslim countries. The first two orders were thrown out by the courts. But the Supreme Court upheld a third, narrower proclamation proscribing travel from six Muslim countries. The majority disingenuously limited itself to ruling on executive authority over the borders (a decision easily rationalized by the inclusion of non-Muslim North Korea and Venezuela in the ban) and openly discounting Trump's anti-Muslim comments. The opinion ignored both the constitutional question raised by an explicitly religious disqualification, as well as broader Supreme Court precedent regarding treatment of foreigners during national crisis. Centering her dissent on these two flaws, Justice Sonia Sotomayor asserted liberal multiculturalism as the constitutional response to exclusionary

homogenization. America's Founders embedded religious neutrality in the First Amendment, she wrote, but the majority decision leaves "undisturbed a policy first advertised openly and unequivocally as a 'total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States.'" With regard to any supposed threat posed by foreigners, she condemned the decision as inconsistent with the Court's reversal of *Korematsu*, which permitted internment of Japanese citizens during World War II. In that infamous case, she said, the majority gave "a pass [to] an odious, gravely injurious racial classification," relied on vague national security arguments that the government never justified with evidence, and decided based on "dangerous stereotypes about, *inter alia*, a particular group's supposed inability to assimilate" (U.S. Supreme Court 2018).

Muslims and the communities that receive them do face challenges, as Akbar Ahmed found during visits to Muslim communities in 75 cities. Not only do Americans in general possess few reference points for understanding Islam other than the world created by 9/11, Muslims were often divided between immigrants and African-Americans, while race complicated educational outreach for religious toleration. Resistance to integration from host communities thus fueled frustration and sometimes, isolation (Ahmed, 2010). Research from Europe points to similar conclusions. One study specifically focused on attitudes toward asylum seekers conducted a "conjoint" experiment with 18,000 respondents across 15 countries. It found that people were welcoming of highly skilled migrants or those who had suffered physical harm like torture. But anti-Muslim sentiment was pervasive across all respondents—even among those who scored high on a measure of empathy. These negative attitudes were twice as strong among right wing respondents than for those identifying as left (Bansak et al., 2016).

The (white) nationalist narrative replacing assimilation with exclusion also depends upon a revisionist history that removes domestic experiences of coercion, spinning homogeneity into nostalgic positives. If the original southern weapon of states' rights lived on for other purposes, so too can the notion that slavery persisted because slaves were not treated so badly. The Trump administration wove African American slavery into its bizarre fusion of voluntary and involuntary movement of peoples. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Ben Carson described America as a land of opportunity for immigrants, then added "there were other immigrants who came here in the bottom of slave ships, worked even longer, even harder for less" (Tracy and DelReal, 2017). Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos praised Historically Black Colleges and Universities as "pioneers" in school choice, apparently surprised by the fact that they emerged because of segregation that prohibited African Americans from attending colleges. (The classic academic understanding of multiculturalism treats African-Americans as a special case: even though they did not come to America voluntarily, they do not make claims to separate nationhood characteristic of other national minorities. Kymlicka here is perhaps too dismissive of Black nationalist movements).

Such myths of assimilation risk obscuring the frequent historical role of violence in achieving it. Mexican-American activists are fond of saying "we did not cross the border, the border crossed us," referring to the American annexation of Texas, New Mexico and California after the Mexican War of 1846–48. Native Americans similarly had no say in whether and how to integrate, and continue to suffer from tremendous disparities across socioeconomic indicators. Hawaiians

experienced a similar cultural imperialism. In the century following Captain James Cook's arrival in 1778, the indigenous population suffered catastrophic 90 percent loss in size due to disease, and those who survived were cajoled into Christianity. In an 1848 land distribution program, chiefs and the king took two-thirds of the land, resulting in massive homelessness. Then education in native Hawaiian was outlawed in 1896, shortly after the Hawaiian monarchy was overthrown. When a treaty with the US failed in 1897, President William McKinley went ahead and annexed the islands anyway the following year (Furuta et al., 2015). Mark Twain and a group known as the Anti-Imperialists opposed this military involvement in the Pacific, much as Henry David Thoreau attempted to salvage liberalism's conscience with his savage critiques of the Mexican War. Reactionary populists look back on these histories and see coercion for exclusion and coercion for assimilation on a spectrum of legitimate national behavior; diversity and inclusion are beside the point. For the left, coercion into a nation meant no liberalism because there was no consent.

Multiculturalism explicitly advances liberal principles of tolerance, non-discrimination, and civic participation at odds with coercion against immigrants and all types of minorities. Abrams and other progressives have built from liberalism's autonomy of the individual, extended it to new identities, and proposed a type of multiculturalism without boundaries or, in effect, borders. But these identity politics has extended multiculturalism in ways that the theory itself has resisted—not on principle but because it stretches the concept. "The marginalization of women, gays and lesbians, and the disabled cuts across ethnic and national lines, writes Kymlicka, adding that "it must be fought in all these places." At the same time, multiculturalism does not serve as a substitute for the word "diversity" as it appears in colloquial usage. It is not, says Kymlicka, "an umbrella term for every group-related difference in moral perspective or personal identity" (Kymlicka, 1995, 19). In other words, multicultural theorists are sympathetic to the expansion of identity claims—as expressions of autonomy rooted in liberalism's path to freedom and community. But the expansion of liberal rights into areas that derive from neither polyethnic nor national minority claims do not fit within this model. Even when identity claims may be just, the classic formulation of multiculturalism lacks a strategy for resolving the tensions within liberalism as well as the (problematic) assimilationist assumptions of America's majoritarian constitutional model.

Before introducing pluralist solidarity as a tool to remedy multiculturalism's limitations within the American liberal tradition, it's useful to outline critiques of identity politics as type of distortion, or abuse of the cultural ideal of multiculturalism. That multiculturalism was the place where President Reagan might have met Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Liberalism as democratic liability?

For Patrick Deneen, Stacy Abrams' embrace of identity politics represents an overextension of multiculturalism and a driving force in liberalism's collapse. "The homogenization celebration of every culture effectively means no culture at all." The discourse of "choice," "pluralism," and "diversity" are fully divorced from the local and historical experiences that constitute culture in the first place. Liberalism has succeeded, Deneen submits, but in doing so it left us with a crude choice between the state or the market—the two paths to freedom through depersonalization of self. "And while progressive

liberals claim to advance a shared sense of national destiny and solidarity that should decrease the advance of an individualist economy and reduce income inequality, the only part of the left's political agenda that has triumphed has been the project of personal and especially sexual autonomy" (Deneen, 2018, 17, 63, passim). Mark Lilla similarly writes "American liberalism has slipped into a kind of moral panic about racial, gender and sexual identity that has distorted liberalism's message and prevented it from becoming a unifying force capable of governing" (Lilla, 2016). It is bad for democracy, and a recipe for electoral loss; Abrams' coalition is too fractious and too fragmented, in his eyes.

Francis Fukuyama agrees that progressives have abandoned economic cleavages as a mobilizing principle of politics. However, his critique centers on identity politics as a human search for recognition. Liberal democracy promised to restrain the desire to be recognized as superior, and it enabled the search for respect on an equal basis, satisfying the part of the soul that craves dignity, in Greek philosophy. The Protestant Reformation transformed this idealization. It set out to recognize the authenticity of each person and challenge the rigidity of the Catholic Church, which dictated the basis of individual belief through its hierarchy. For identity to emerge in the way we think about it today, it took Rousseau's efforts to establish it as a secular idea, rather than one just associated with faith. This places the self in tension with an externally existing other.

For Fukuyama, the subsequent turn to Hegel is then important because the desire for recognition—*thymos*—unleashes a struggle for universal recognition, like the French Revolution, rather than Rousseau's inward reconciliation of soul and society. Tracing the journey through feudalism, nationalism, and colonialism, Fukuyama brings us to the heart of his critique: through identity, we are valorizing feelings and "lived experiences" of victimization rather than seeking out truths. As a result, the left has failed to confront (or politically capitalize on) globalization's inequalities. Like Deneen, liberalism succeeded, for example by expanding the franchise. But individualism also got tangled up in a "therapeutic turn," turning liberalism into a tool for securing self-esteem and not just advancing rights. With the notable exception of Obamacare, says Fukuyama, progressives came to prioritize the dignity of small groups over social policies to reduce broader inequalities. Universities were complicit, he says, tweaking syllabi and adopting "trigger warnings" rather than taking on big questions.

Many on the right share these critiques: libertarians see universities and elites as hypocritically undermining free speech in defense of individuals who crave recognition, prioritizing emotion over empirics. Another branch of the right, the lesser-known objectivists, protest for a different reason. Disciples of Ayn Rand such as former Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, former Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan, and (I might argue) Donald Trump, see egoism as virtuous. Those who are selfish and do not rely on others for recognition, show strength and act upon their true selves, rather than worrying about society (Burns, 2009). In other words, the awakening of empathy through pity and compassion, in Rousseau's *Second Discourse* and *Emile,* is a pathetic form of weakness. Despite Trump's obsession with his critics and his demand for unquestioning loyalty, *being* superior matters more than seeking recognition as such.

In *The Souls of Yellow Folk,* essayist Wesley Yang also positions the Hegelian quest for recognition at the center of our fraught multicultural moment, "an age characterized by the politics of

resentment." Where progressives once fought racism and sexism, he says, discourse now targets "whiteness" and "masculinity," inseparable from power or gender toxicity, respectively. "This intricate system of racial casuistry, worthy of Jesuits, is a beguiling compound of insight, partial truths, circular reasoning, and dogmatism operating within a self-enclosed system of reference immunized against critique and optimized for virality" (Yang, 2018, 206). Identity politics is not a paradoxical success of liberalism, as Deneen asserts, it is rather progressives' potentially self-destructive claim that liberalism *failed* to guarantee equal treatment and non-discrimination. Yang thus shares some of Fukuyama's concern about identity unchained, suggesting that categories could form an "iron cage," providing an incomplete but convenient way to interpret and engage the world. An abused tool in the new "ideological war" is microaggression, a therapeutic term deployed to replace debate and scholarship with "administrative and disciplinary power to delegitimize, stigmatize, disqualify, surveil, forbid, shame, and punish holders of contrary views" (Yang, 2018, 213).

Yang's book opens with a confessional of resentment and an assertion that Asian-Americans are uniquely situated between a "peculiar burden of nonrecognition, of invisibility" that erases them from television, movies and popular culture, and also some unstated acceptability to white America—"fundamentally powerless to affect anyone in a way that would make you either loved or feared" (Yang, 2018, xi). For Yang, his condition of being (an Asian man in America), his "true and unspeakable" status caught him between white America and marginalized America. (Critical race theorists mislabel this ambiguity with the pejorative "white adjacent," inferring from the comparatively high achievements of Asian-Americans evidence of racial privilege). For Stacey Abrams there is no invisibility for aggrieved peoples, who as Martin Luther King, Jr. did in 1964, are choosing what seems like a radical course of action because they must. Yet her multiculturalism, embodying the politics of identity, must still somehow intersect with liberalism's three great principles—protecting people from abusive states, providing a process for ascertaining public truths, and reining in the public tide of majoritarianism—if it seeks to resolve the defects of liberalism's rival legacies ailing America today.

Conclusion: towards "pluralist solidarity"

To deliver on the promise of equality, America must remedy the defects of the constitution: first among them the Electoral College, which has outlived its utility as a device for federalism. It has come to both represent a nation's unwillingness to fully abandon the institutional vestiges of slavery—though the "three fifths" clause (not counting slaves as full people in the Constitution) was abandoned long ago (Amar, 2016). The other hard work ahead, to live up to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence (and notably *not* the Constitution), liberalism must first allow for more discrete terms of recognition. Equality of opportunity, or the legal anonymization of the individual, has provided an insufficient remedy for social and institutional forms of discrimination. The ideal of pluralist solidarity brings together the promise of an expansive multiculturalism and liberalism's more hopeful legacy of tolerance as inseparable from our realities of diversity. It seeks to acknowledge the limited achievements of civil rights, while grounding principles of fairness reflected by universal

rights. This is perhaps more of a social and political project than a legal one.

Second, liberalism must acknowledge what Marcus Raskin described as the ethical component of identity politics, whereby subgroups pursue their own internal critiques of hierarchy and then articulate a commitment to the (external) environment. In his view, multiculturalism is wholly compatible with American liberalism, but "human responsibility precedes the importance of individual culture, and ethnic, class, or race loyalty" (Raskin, 2004, 154–55). This implies that those who embrace identity must also explore and identify with broad boundaries of community alongside their narrower, intersectional ones. Religion may have once provided an ethical compass for this, as it did for much of the civil rights movement. "Reason by itself is little more than an instrument to justify man's defensive ways of thinking," declared Martin Luther King (King, 1986c, 36). As we act upon our "same basic desires for recognition, for importance, that same desire for attention, that same desire to be first," we need an ethical basis for our autonomy—which liberalism and reason alone cannot provide (King, 1986a, 259–67). With the rather rapid decline of religion, particularly in urban life, America is missing this mechanism.

Pluralist solidarity aims to navigate this ethical gap by moving America towards nationhood that sees the civil and political rights of individuals as attached to their cultural identity, rather than jeopardized by it (as many post-Reagan conservatives fear). In this view, if the constitution guarantees freedom of speech, assembly, and religious belief, it also affords citizens wide latitude in answering the question, "Who am I?" This proposes to resolve the competing narratives of the nation above, for example, by placing refugees and immigrants under the same empathetic umbrella as other minorities. The government should therefore minimize harm against those individuals by enforcing non-discrimination and facilitating freedom. This freedom includes a recognition of one's right to articulate an identity, to assert the basis of difference on one's own terms. Individuals therefore need not choose between personal dignity and collective well-being. At the same time, upholding such rights, and strategies for doing so, need to recognize the collective impacts of marginalization or discrimination.

Contemporary identity politics, however, has obscured an important feature of such marginalization, which arises from the offensive or unacceptable practices of the minority that may need protecting. To minimize marginalization, one must also reasonably maximize *toleration* as court decisions about home schooling, religious snake handling, or military conscientious objection affirm. Such toleration rests on a clear objection to the unacceptable practice or belief, an acceptance which entails justifying the objection and accepting the scope of others' freedom, and shared boundaries for rejection. Those boundaries are often articulated to correct power asymmetries, such as historical injustices at the root of recent racial justice movement, but they do not strictly require the existence of a power asymmetry (Carter, 2013). Respect for the resulting diversity—through toleration—both fosters human dignity and benefits society. What's good for the soul is good for our civic life: diverse groups are better at problem solving for example, especially when confronted with non-routine problems (Page, 2017). This challenges the right to accept an expansive multicultural integration as the most honorable and logical legacy of liberalism. For conservatives, the desire for community—a pleading from intellectuals such as David Brooks—can yet triumph over the nostalgic last gasp denying demographic diversity as the reality of America, and not just its promise.

A dignity grounded in shared ideals of humanity, as proposed by Raskin, may also provoke the left, which at the moment lacks a coherent explanation for increases in ethnic minority support for the party of Trump in 2018, 2020, and 2022. The tactical error of identity politics has been to place the right to individual personhood beyond the reach of community; the "social construction of reality" has been unleashed with a downsized "social." By contrast, the Civil Rights generation worked to change values and laws together as part of a shared idea of the public. When the courts seemed to step out in front of prevailing social norms, the civil rights movement worked to bring the nation along with the government. Notably, amidst the contentious presidential election in 1964, pundits complained that civil rights were moving too fast, and solid majorities of Americans in both north and south agreed. Activists therefore set out to change peoples' behavior by changing values. Martin Luther King saw the risk of white backlash. "There must be a grand alliance of Negro and white. This alliance must consist of the vast majorities of each group," he said, because they need to "tackle the social injustices that afflict *both* of them" (King, 1986b, 176–81).

Building such alliances presents challenges, whether the divide refers to attitudes on gender rights or immigrants (as Norris and Inglehart point out). But research does point to possible paths to pluralist solidarity, building on Abrams' aspirational multiculturalism. For example, evidence indicates that accommodation can reduce the divisive feelings about Muslims. Inclusive policies for language or religious practices significantly reduce feelings of discrimination, reducing risks of a self-reinforcing cycle that undermines integration (Breton, 2019). In short, multiculturalism works—and societies facing new waves of migrants risk social polarization without it. Forcing immigrants to choose between embracing the duties of citizenship and honoring the memories of who they are is simply put, bad policy. Moreover, legislating multiculturalism is less risky than political moderates fear. "The cautionary lessons that those espousing opinion backlash claim—go slow or risk harming your cause—appear more politically than empirically motivated" (Bishin et al., 2016, 15).

Finally, pluralist solidarity recenters liberalism as a way to foster tolerance, diversity, and doubt as the basis for shared truths rather than the atomized experiences that fuel our polarized politics. King deeply appreciated the reason of the Enlightenment, "its devotion to the search for the truth, its insistence on an open and analytical mind, its refusal to abandon the best light of reason" (King, 1986c, 35). This represents a hope for a liberalism that corrects for Trump's post-truth presidency that began by denying observable realities about the size of an inaugural crowd and ended with a bloody insurrection at the Capitol building, and for epistemologies that assert the experiential as existential.

Modern manifestations of the quest for recognition risk ignoring reason, neglecting ethics and distorting (or denying) reality. America needs to chart a course through Hegelian waters that reforms, reconstructs, and respects. Somehow, we need difference with more dialog and less dialectic, and reason without what King called the "fundamentalism" of the antirationalist attack on liberalism. We need a pluralist solidarity embracing multiculturalism within our majoritarianism. We must identify the common good that salvages liberalism from the simmering embers of nihilistic democratic decay.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

AL: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

Acknowledgments

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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