

INTRODUCTION

In July of 1856 Caroline Cowles, a child of thirteen living in Canandagua, New York, made an interesting entry in the diary she had been keeping since her tenth birthday. Caroline did not write every day, and, in July, she would make only one other entry. The entry is dated « Saturday Night, July » and reads:

Grandfather was asking us to-night how many things we could remember, and I told him I could remember when Zachary Taylor died, and our church was draped in black, and Mr. Daggett preached a funeral sermon about him, and I could remember when Daniel Webster died, and there was a service held in the church and his last words, « I still live », were put up over the pulpit. He said he could remember when George Washington died and when Benjamin Franklin died. He was seven years old then and he was seventeen when Washington died. Of course his memory goes farther back than mine, but he said I did very well, considering¹.

Caroline is right in feeling that the episode is no ordinary exchange. Grandfather is not given to games or frivolity; he comes through these pages, as does Grandmother, as a conscious educator and here we have a lesson, even with a sort of « mark » at the end.

What is involved here is not so much memory itself as the conscious creation of the category of memory. Not memory as experience or feeling recalled or even as history recovered², but memory as citizenship and a very specific type of citizenship, historically new and firmly linked to an American republican theory.

Caroline remembers the death of Zachary Taylor which had occurred in July of 1850, when she was seven, and of Daniel Webster (August, 1852). The choice of memories indicated that the « things » grandfather asked about,

¹ Richards, Caroline Cowles, *Village Life in America, 1852-1872*, Henry Holt, New York 1912.

² Yet it is certainly part of the same conceptual world which gives us the many memoirs of revolutionary service, published and in manuscript, which are so uniquely characteristic of the American situation. Such memoirs, often mistaken for diaries, sometimes based upon diaries which have not survived, recover the revolution as history, as formation of the Republic by the citizen in arms and consciously mean to propose the experience, the feelings, the history, they recover as counter statement, as interpretation of the authentic geneological line of the Republic.

those worthy of active memory, were public rather than personal. And the cut of the memory points to the severely calvinistic tone of her education, both grandparents being Presbyterians with a traditional New England background and viewpoint, for Caroline is impressed by deaths and funeral rites. Yet from her tone also transpires the vibrations of a participation in the « spiritualism » and the revivalistic enthusiasm of the '50s in the attention to black drapes and Webster's last words.

Grandfather's rejoinder confirms the educational nature of the episode and defines it. He *chooses*, among the « known » of the past available to him, the deaths of Franklin and Washington, confirming the idea, quite fundamental to traditional sectarian protestanism that it is the life entire – the death – that allows judgement; that stands for the whole person. Again, the life points toward the death and great men are such because worthy of recall in their deaths. The first lesson, is, then, that of celebration of the life as completed work, as something « made » by the person who has lived it. Grandfather does not remember Washington as first president – though, as he recalls Franklin's death, he might have done so. But his death. Thus, too, the moral example to others is underlined.

In his choice of figures, he also indicates that greatness (as Caroline has already intuitively grasped by living in this sort of family and community) requires involvement in the construction and the leadership of the country. Greatness is civic. The country is a central – or even the central – concern of the memory, and therefore of the thought of its citizens. Further, the citizens of the country engaged in this activity of constructive preservation – memory – are men, women and children. The country, the Republic, in this view is and requires the active presence of mind of all of its population. Republican nationalism is, in this sense, the central concern of all and steadily embedded in virtue and education; and in the family as a social nucleus. Grandfather is careful to note that he was seven when Franklin died; the same age as Caroline on the death of Taylor. Their memory begins at the same age – often then called « the age of reason ». A comparison is thus invited between Franklin and Taylor, but a double and parallel continuity is also suggested, that of family generations and that of republican leadership.

Grandfather has set a pattern of pleasure of civic memory – the asking and the sharing of memory is also affection and companionship; a pattern which stresses continuity – security of virtuous government and virtuous men across the inevitable cadence of life rhythms. A republic equivalent of « the king is dead, long live the king », it must be built by the people through the family and may, by these individuals and this society, be built well or badly. Thus the Republic falls upon the individual and obliges him or her to make choices in daily life with its needs in mind. The private is part of the public³.

³ See, for example, Kerber, Linda, *Women of the Republic. Intellect & Ideology in Revolutionary America*, North Carolina, Chapel Hill 1980, on republican motherhood.

Caroline now remembers Taylor and Webster. These are congruous memories as regards office or role: the one a president, the other a Senator, a lawyer and a man of culture and worthy causes – especially antislavery; Grandfather reinforces the choice by naming the two parallel individuals and, by so doing, also reinforces the tendency to comparison and thus to a sense of historic depth.

When Caroline is older, she may « remember » rather the death of Lincoln than that of Taylor, though technically both will be available to her experience of national reality. This is certainly implicit not only in Grandfather's « memory », but in his commendation – « Of course his memory goes farther back than does mine, but he said I did very well, considering ». Grandfather's memory « goes back » to the inception of the Republic; it is a measure for that Republic. A « danger » of selectivity is, of course, remembering the office alone, considering *all* presidents or *all* senators « memorable ». This would produce an obedient, nationalist, acritical citizen but not, in this view, a proper republican whose essence is, Grandfather shows, critical choice of a sequence; the definition of a republican geneology and a republican tradition. Madison does not appear in grandfather's list of memory, nor do Hamilton, Jefferson or John Adams. Calhoun, who died in 1850 does not appear in Caroline's list.

Canandaigua, where this exchange occurred, is one of the symbolic situations of the historic moment this book is interested in exploring. A community in up-state New York, still close to the experience of settlement, fully in the area which gave rise to the religious enthusiasm of the early decades of the 19th century, it was in these very years home to the vigorous attempts at alternative social organization. The Mormons had been and the Oneida experimenters were neighbors. Nor was the area alien to the new urban realities and the shift in economic structure, for Rochester, a new city at once born of Westward migration to and beyond Canandaigua itself and of changes in commerce and industry⁴, is close by.

Grandfather's position, his « lesson », is that of a pre-party republican. More precisely, it is that of a republican whig, strongly influenced by a kind of Presbyterianism which was no longer central to the church as a whole⁵, and still more marginal as regards the religiosity which had by the 1850s imprinted private, social and political life⁶. One might almost define the position and the character stance it reflects anachronistic, if it were not for the fact that both are here engaged in the successful formation of a generation which

⁴ See Johnson, Paul, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium. Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837*, Hill & Wang, New York 1978.

⁵ For the changing tone of protestantism in the first half of the 19th century, and the shift away from the traditional evangelical churches towards Baptist and Methodist churches, see Smith, Timothy, *Revivalism & Social Reform. American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*, revised edition, Johns Hopkins, Baltimore 1980.

⁶ For the Canandaigua area, see Ryan, Mary, *Cradle of the Middle Class; the Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*, Cambridge, New York 1981.

will marry and have children after the Civil War and so perpetuate the mentality, however attenuated and re-elaborated, until the turn of the century.

The episode is a very minute tessera in the great mosaic which is the « making » of America as a system of institutional relationships, image/concepts and feelings; a making that is going on not only at the level of political, economic and social élites which set its guidelines, but among the people at large. As the party system makes the overt framework of national formation increasingly rigid, prescribing the spaces and ritualizing the participation, such « making », though it is the very stuff of power's legitimacy and continuing life, becomes less and less visible; we know less and less of what those who believed the institutions legitimately operated by the competing élites who exercised power thought their contribution to be and even why they accepted as indeed legitimate the interpretation the élites offered. The depths of popular feeling about the very abstract concepts of « the Union » and the « Republic » which is revealed at the moment of secession – in the South not less than in the North or the old and new West – and persists among the various local populations during the war, show how much « making », how much constructing of compatible world-view, of imagining the nation « as proposed », had been going on among the people in the second quarter of the century⁷.

Yet, as this series of essays indicates, alongside the « making » of America, the day to day building, behaving and reinforcement within the framework as offered, equally complex and vigorous « unmaking » and « remaking » are being proposed, both as lives lived and as theory elaborated. The very fact that the national model – the Republic (the State) – is in formation during the first half of the century, that « America » is being « made » (and that territorial expansion, immigration, the growth of cities, the rise of industry are visible signs of the on-going nature of that « making »), encourages ideas of other ways and other models, already present in the revolutionary situation, to continue vital. And, at the same time, the very fluidity of the material components of the « making » render it extremely difficult to form oppositions and counter-proposals that are efficacious as alternatives.

John Scott Strickland and Michael Johnson show the close interlacing of « remaking », « making » and « unmaking » in the South. Evangelical religion, from the late 18th century, entered the South as a consciously reforming movement. The making over of lapsed Christians and the Christianization of the unchurched and the slave might well be undertaken in the name of order and civility, with a view to assuring the governability of the rough

⁷ See Valtz Mannucci, Loretta, « Pension Applications, Diaries and Narrative for Future Memory: Recollection's Selectivity », unedited mimeographed paper presented at the first Milan Group symposium (« Society and the Republic, 1790-1850 », Milan, Italy, 2-4 June, 1982) where this question is discussed with regard to the Virginia pension applications under the 1832 law; and see also the introduction to the reader. Valt Mannucci, Loretta, *Gli Stati Uniti nell'età di Jackson. Il dibattito sulla Repubblica*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1987.

lower orders bent on disorderly democracy and levelling. That was the view not only of Yale president Ezra Stiles in the early years of the Republic, but, later, as the expanding areas and the social pressures of the agrarian backcountry grew, the program of the several unified organizations of the evangelical churches launched in the mid-1820s⁸. But revivalism and Christianization contain, as well, the seeds of a millennialism whose civic implications may be revolutionary. As Donald Mathews has shown⁹, the South was not only the chief target of these associations, but itself the source of grass-roots religious revival whose vigor derived from the unstructured nature of its frontier environment.

The reverend Elhanan Winchester of Boston is a pre-revolutionary example of the unsettling effects of this cultural climate and his « conversion » experience opens the way to major theme: that of the effects of Christianization on the slave communities throughout the South. As Strickland points out, the civic potential for millennial proposal – the unmaking and remaking anew of the Republic – latent in evangelicalism is clearly present in the Christianization of slaves as lived by them (not less than among those whites who were caught in the flame of revival and rebirth in New York or in the old West).

The risky relation between reform and stability, the potentiality of reform to set in motion radical change: the fear that democratic practise may, indeed, provoke the lower orders to wish to participate in decision making – to have power as well as to be declared its legitimizing factor – are at the center of Michael Johnson's examination of the pre-war South. And in engaging the moral insulation which resisted the central reform – the reform implicit in the evangelical contents of Christianization which proposed the individual as the seat of conscience and moral judgement over against any institution – that is the end of slavery, Johnson delineates too the links between the end of slavery and the end of the structure of white power among whites in the South. A theme Hinton Rowan Helper, son of a North Carolina farmer, had clearly in mind when he wrote *The Impending Crisis of the South* in 1857.

With Robert Gross, the view shifts North to a very limited « majority of one » quite consciously engaged in unmaking to remake. Thoreau's ideal positions are viewed here in the context of the making of America under way in the new areas of the economy: the factory and the restructuring of the middle classes; the end of town and the birth of city. And, as well, the reorganization of political practice, with the creation of the political party as it was thereafter to be, combining élite organization and control with popular oratory and obescence to « the public »¹⁰, appealing to sentiment and impression, to

⁸ See Willis, John Randolph, *God's Frontiersmen: The Yale Band in Illinois*, University Press of America, Washington 1979, and Kuykendall, John, *Southern Enterprise. The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South*, Greenwood, Westport 1982.

⁹ Mathews, Donald, *Religion in the Old South*, University of Chicago, Chicago 1977.

¹⁰ The literature on this subject has grown rapidly in the last ten years as the consciousness

« national feeling », rather than to the conscience, interest or reason. The « majority of one » is a counterstandard of action whose import is, Gross feels, social and political as well as intimate and private; programmatic as well as judgmental, as quantification acquires moral authority.

The mingling of public and private, the public nature of private « making », the « unmaking » potentials of private « remaking », are the concerns of Stephen Nissenbaum, Luisa Cetti, Christine Stansell and Liana Borghi, who examine sexual norms in the first half of the 19th century and evaluate the degree in which reform proposals were re-stabilizing adaptations to new situations deriving from expectations in the Republic; changing modes of working and living, in city and on the land; the presence of new mentalities as immigration grew. Stephen Nissenbaum is especially interested in the development of a new concept of marriage in which sexual expression is seen as self-expression and intimate mutuality. At the same time this new concept creates a new potentially liberatory space for women in marriage, and opens the way to divorce as well as to property rights for the married woman. The more radical reformers, through the right to liberty in sexuality, pose the further question of the quality of the sexual relationship and, through this, that of its restructuring as practice as well as its role in the organization of the broader society. These are the themes of the Rutland Free Convention when reformers of all sorts met and where the ultimately deconstructive potentials of middle class reform appear, as Luisa Cetti points out, in the women who speak. The deconstructive force of the world view of women of the period is examined in the reality of working class, often immigrant, women in New York by Christine Stansell and in the novels of a series of women writing in the 1850s for other middle class women by Liana Borghi.

The intermixture of reform and radical modification of relationships pointing to structural reform, finds its climate in the very numerous attempts at creating counter institutions: alternative communities whose declared or tacit ambition is to propose new institutional realities which might become, by example, a new Republic. The thematic is certainly implicit in evangelical religion and it is this world that offers the most striking examples of wholly native counter-republics. As Anna Violante shows in examining Oneida, the restructuring of marriage and sexuality is often at the heart of such new civic situations, but it is so in the sense which engages a broader question – and one that is both traditional to historic Christianity and fundamental to the organization of democratic republican government. That is the concept of self-domination as self-expression, the deliberate choice to eschew passionality

of the importance of the period for political structures and practise has become sharp. The analyses come from all quarters of the spectrum (Remini, Formisano, Maizlish, Wilentz, Pessen) and have reached out to include the South, innovating as regards earlier interest in party formation and political reorganization of institutionalized power. Perhaps the question of new nationalism is the only one as yet rather firmly in the traditional mould set by Dangerfield.

while promoting pleasure, play, dialogue and friendship. Among alternative institutions a remarkable number were attempted directly by Europeans, both due to the myth of the Republic as a reality in on-going formation and to the progressive opening of Western lands (in some sense « evidence » of that continuing formation). In this sense, as Herbert Gutman has shown for the formation of the labor movement, not only the ideas of Europeans reached 19th century America, but Europeans bearing these ideas and acting upon them in all naturalness. Anthony Wallace has given us an intriguing glimpse of such « making » of a different America in *Rockdale*¹¹. In the episodes he describes, Europeans and native born Americans set off together into the countryside of the 1820s moved by secular rationalism and the success of Owenite communities in England. Roberto Tumminelli and Izabella Rusinowa examine two wholly European attempts at once middle class and socialist, both prompted by failure in Europe. The difficulties and the questions posed by the crises and failures of the various communities examined are echoed by the final essays in which Augusta Molinari and Larry Portis examine two attempts to propose alternative communities in a European setting.

Augusta Molinari deals with an Italian Christian alternative institutional proposal, whose origins in rural subordinate classes, millenaristic tone and violent repression make it an interesting counterpoint to Oneida. Larry Portis, looking beyond our early industrializing context, explores the role of the late 19th century industrial state and its more efficient organization in stifling alternative proposals.

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¹¹ Wallace, Anthony, *Rockdale. The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution*, Norton, New York 1972.