Freedom and Domination

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Freedom and Domination: The Garden of Eden and the Social Order*

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ABSTRACT

A study of the Garden of Eden mythology as it appears in three cultural contexts—ancient Jewish, early Christian, and early American—sheds light on the relationship between cultural forms and social organization. The paper argues that cultural expressions play a definitional role in boundary maintenance at times of social crisis. The Garden of Eden imagery was used for symbolic expression of conflicts among social groups, acting at times as a vehicle for conflict, and in other instances as a means of reducing conflict. By both compensating for fragmentation and social deficiencies on the one hand (the compensatory aspect of culture), and by reflecting the interests of status groups and individuals on the other (the reflective aspect of culture), the Eden saga provided symbolic expression of the issue central to processes of boundary maintenance, social change, and conflict.

Culture and Society

Dynamic relationships between culture and society are often observed in times of crisis and change in a society. When particular historical events result in the breakdown of existing social arrangements or render them problematic, a crisis of social identity may develop. Various forms of cultural expression—systems of beliefs, myths, legends, ideology—are frequently invoked by people in an effort to respond to crisis.

The Garden of Eden saga has been used in many such occasions of social response to crises. A study of how that legend has been used in different contexts reveals a twofold process of boundary maintenance and conflict management.¹ When the fabric of social life is torn apart, there are

*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, 1977. I am indebted to Steven Dubin, Robert Fowler, Jeffrey Goldfarb, Rowan Greer III, Terence Halliday, Robert Heim, Donald Levine, David Moberg, Michael Schudson, and Edward Shils, as well as anonymous reviewers, for comments and suggestions.

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various methods by which members of a society might reinforce social solidarity. Those attempts at boundary maintenance do not always involve a reduction in conflict, however, when it is not in the interests of a particular group to mitigate conflict. Moreover, as Georg Simmel (b) pointed out, conflict "itself is a form of sociation" and may be an essential factor in continuing interaction. Legal contracts, for example, provide bridges across differences, rather than merely uniting similarities. It is quite possible that a form of cultural expression such as the Eden saga will be used to heighten conflict while at the same time emphasizing social unity. Firm boundaries mark off both (or the several) parties to the conflict, placing the opponents within the same framework and orienting them toward the same central value system of the society. Conflict management, therefore, does not necessarily mean the mitigation or elimination of conflict, just as managing a corporation or a baseball team does not require the corporation's or team's diminution or elimination. Conflict management refers to attempts by various parties to maximize their control over the conflict, attempting to diminish, sustain, or heighten the level of conflict, or to affect its direction or content in the interests of a group.

One important aspect of the boundary maintenance process is raising the issues in a conflict to a higher level of abstraction (Simmel, a). It is at that point that cultural expressions play a key part. When the unity of immediate experience is shattered, cultural forms arise (Levine). Social crises may throw individuals into a quandary about their relationship to society, and cultural forms enable individuals and networks of individuals to reinterpret the world in light of the new social environment created by the crisis. The immediate conflict takes on a cosmic significance; tensions between the individual and society are interpreted in symbols, myths, and legends.

Cultural symbols may provide a common focus for social identity, placing conflict in a different perspective and highlighting the common bond uniting the conflicting parties. Members of a family, for example, might remind one another of family legends, such as a story about an incident of adolescent rebellion by Grandpa. The story told over the years might mean different things to different family members. To the parents, it is a story of the need for restraint, the foolishness of youth, and the wisdom of parents. To the young it could be a story affirming the importance and legitimacy of rebellion and freedom. Differing interpretations which surface in times of hot debate within the family can lead to the use of the story as a vehicle for expressing conflicts while still laughing together about the incident and reaffirming the family's unity in spite of conflicts. In larger conflicts, literary strata sometimes play a creative role by gathering together symbols in the existing cultural milieu to which all parties of the conflict can relate, and by reshaping them into a complex of cultural symbols which speaks to aspects of the struggle. Cultural symbols may then
sustain, reinforce, or modify beliefs and cognitive orientations which affect change.

The Garden of Eden saga has appeared in many historical contexts, providing a key set of symbols which have articulated aspects of social conflicts. Beginning with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the saga provides a picture of humanity free of social and physical constraints. Adam and Eve’s misuse of that freedom resulted in the proverbial “fall” of humanity. Human freedom was thereafter constrained by physical toil and compulsory subjection to the authority of God. Thus, one aspect of the mythology symbolizes freedom, the other domination. Various social groups attempt to use the story to legitimate their status within society by emphasizing different aspects of the story.

In this paper I will show how conflicting themes of freedom and domination are woven into a cultural narrative, and provide a symbolic focus for constructing a social identity for groups within a society. That social identity often includes within it a symbolic resolution of the conflicts between freedom and domination, which are usually translated into such questions as “freedom for whom?” and “domination of whom?” The boundaries of the society are reinforced in a symbolic manner and conflicts are expressed symbolically. My aim, then, is to examine the relationships between cultural forms and the forms of social organization in which they are enmeshed. In following the implications of Weber’s research, Geertz has suggested that the analysis of cultural forms “is a two-stage operation: first, an analysis of the system of meanings embodied in the symbols” under investigation. Second, one should look at the “relation of these meanings to social structural and psychological processes” (203). Are there “elective affinities” between social groups and the orientations implied in cultural form (Weber, a)? The complexity of the process by which a set of cultural symbols is appropriated by social strata does not lend itself easily to analysis. That analysis is attempted here by examining the uses of the Eden saga in three periods of crisis, in ancient Jewish, early Christian, and early American, cultural contexts. Although the emphasis is on the American context, it is helpful to look briefly at the other two settings, for purposes of historical comparison.

In ancient Israel the increasing fragmentation of society led to reflection by the literary strata on the traditions of the Hebrew tribes and their Babylonian neighbors. That reflection resulted in the forming of the Eden saga into a powerful legend which reoriented the past and enabled later rabbis to focus on future hopes. In early Christianity, the fall of many independent political systems and increased intermingling of various national and ethnic groups combined with the break of Christians from Jewish traditions, to result in a fragmentation of the early Christian community. In attempts to meet the crisis a new version of the Eden story was created, providing a new source of common identity among members of the com-
munity. Radical boundaries were drawn around the community, separating it from those outside the group, trivializing intra-group conflicts across ideological, class, and ethnic lines.

In all three settings historical events precipitated the breakdown of existing social arrangements, creating crises of social identity. Insofar as we are able to discern the historical events of the periods, and how the Eden saga was used, I will argue that the appropriation of the Eden saga enabled an abstraction of the conflict on a symbolic level. Aspects of the conflict were woven together in a narrative form that made sense within the social context, styles of life, and central values and interests of conflicting parties. Conflicts were thereby managed and society’s boundaries maintained.

It is impossible, of course, to be certain about much of the history surrounding the events analyzed, particularly in the earlier periods. Nor is it possible either to know fully exactly how the Eden story was developed in each case, or to take a random sample of all uses of that story in history. The three contexts sampled were not chosen at random, but because of their historical importance in the formation of Western culture, and of the story itself. The analysis that follows is based on standard scholarly reconstructions of each period, but the reader should be warned that they are subject to various interpretations and should be seen, in part, as hypothetical. Thus, although the study is intended to be an empirical analysis, in part, it must be admitted that it is sometimes more illustrative than empirical, a danger inherent in all but the most specialized and mundane studies of historical material.

Ancient Jewish Culture

At the time of the reign of Solomon (ca. 962–22 B.C.), the Israelitic society was experiencing a period of crisis. Despite the Solomonic achievements and the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem, historical sources from the period suggest that the political unity of northern and southern Hebrew tribes achieved by the Davidic monarchy was dissolving (Bright). The final division of the nation into two kingdoms did not take place until the end of Solomon’s reign in 922, but the schism was acute years earlier. Closely related to the political crisis were conflicts in economic and cultic spheres. The Davidic monarchy had long held an exalted position in Judaic traditions, and yet the price paid for the monarchy’s formation was the dissolution of many cultic and social institutions which contributed to its success (von Rad). Traditions were gradually liberated from the hereditary sphere of the sacred cult. The social order was transformed from a rural and semi-nomadic tribal organization into a more urbanized society. The decline of tribal unity which probably began toward the end of the period of the judges, reached a crucial point during Solomon’s reign.
Political unification created costs in part because of intense antagonisms between peasant proprietors and small-stock-breederers on the one hand, and the urban patriciate associated with the Jerusalem monarchy, on the other. Institutionalization of the monarchy was made possible through the rise to power of the Benjaminites, David, each of whom combined the two sides of the conflict. The monarchy was formed in face of opposition from cultic representatives, however. The location of the monarchy on the major trade routes of the ancient Near East increased the wealth of the urban patriciate, and the growing accumulation of capital sharpened conflicts among the social strata. Increased domination by the urban strata resulted in a typical class antagonism between them and the peasant and small-stock-breeding groups (Weber, b). Prior to the monarchy there was no stable political organization. Any sense of unity apparently grew out of the religious notion of the Berith, or covenant, made between the deity Yahweh and the people.

As a political entity Israel was an oathbound confederation (conjuratio) of tribes which united politically primarily for purposes of warfare under the personal charismatic leadership of the "judges." The peculiarity of the Israelite social order, according to Weber, "consists in the extensive employment of the religious berith as the actual (or construed) basis of the most varied legal and moral relations" (b, 75). As the god of the covenant, Yahweh "became and continued to be god of social organization" (Weber, b; cf. Pederson). The political confederation was activated because of pressure of expanding settlements at the expense of grazing land, and the gradual transition from quasi-Bedouin life to small-stock breeding and more settled life styles. To provide protection from hostile Bedouin tribes in the same territory, military organization was developed by the Hebraic tribes. The confedary, the reduction of available grazing lands, and the military organization resulted in shifting status differentiations and further urbanization of the society (Weber, b). The establishment of the monarchy also hastened the urbanization process and was opposed by the non-urbanized tribes. Under Solomon the royal forces were organized and furnished with chariots and horses imported from Egypt, symbolic of the urbanized, cosmopolitan nature of the political power structure (I Kings 12; Weber b, 56). After Solomon's death, the non-urban strata revolted against the kingdom.

Although it is difficult to date its occurrence, a significant literary production took place in Israelitic society, probably during the reigns of David and Solomon. The individual or group of writers known as the "Yahwist" attempted to mitigate the fragmentation of Israel's society, and to reaffirm Hebraic religious traditions by drawing together elements of those traditions and creating a coherent written statement. It was possibly at that point that the Garden of Eden saga was written in the form in which it now appears in the book of Genesis. The story had existed in
ancient Babylonian culture, however, and was a major part of the Israelite tradition before that time (Sellin and Fohrer).

The Yahwist gathered the saga of Eden and other stories from traditions of both northern and southern tribes. Those traditions were then woven into a narrative that detailed the sacred history of the Israelites up to the time of the monarchy. The Yahwist narrative attempted to emphasize the spiritual and cultural unity, as well as the common ancestry, of both northern and southern tribes, despite the political schism. Also included in the Yahwist narrative was a synthesis of both the monarchical political organization and the peasant and small-stock-breeders' traditions. In reaffirming the patriarchal traditions, including the idea that Adam was something of a patriarch (Scroggs), the plebeian classes who rose up in revolt were shown as playing an important part in the formation of Jewish social organization. Their importance in the present order was legitimated by affirming the centrality of the patriarchs who were themselves plebeians. The monarchy was upheld, but the declining power of the cult was bemoaned. The literary efforts of the Yahwist compensated for the lower status of the non-urban strata by emphasizing the rural roots of the Israelitic people, thereby presumably reducing their opposition to the social order. The tradition also laid the groundwork, however, for a later castigation of the urban patriciate by the prophets, who condemned the wealthy urban classes for their oppression of the poor.

By weaving together oral traditions marking economic strata and touching the common religious and political identity of the various tribes, the Yahwist appealed to the long traditions of in-group and out-group relationships defined within the Judaic traditions (Weber, b). That literary activity was an act of boundary maintenance, in that an attempt was made to reinforce the boundaries separating the Jewish people as a nation from the Gentiles surrounding them. Such culture-wide boundaries were defined as more important than class distinctions within the society. The Yahwist's work provided a cosmic explanation of and legitimation for the solidarity of the Israelites of all classes and tribes. Rooted in the concept of the berith, with old ethics of brotherliness and interest-less aid (Weber, b), the social identity of the Jewish people could be focused on the Yahwist's "sacred history." Parties to the conflict were subordinated under the berith. The common heritage was confirmed and traced back to the foundation of the world. The same god who created Adam and Eve was the protector of the berith and it was not to be violated. The entire corpus of sacred writings of which the Eden saga was a part, and the rituals prescribed by those writings, stood at the center of Jewish culture, and facilitated the continuation of social solidarity for thousands of years. Interpretations of the Eden story proliferated and the saga continued to play an important role as a status legend for the Jewish people. Numerous legends and traditions embellished the saga and were reported in the rabbinic literature. In addition
to reinforcing the *birth* as a form of social solidarity, developments in the Judaic conception of Adam were later useful to the early Christian community as well. It is from rabbinic interpretations of the Garden of Eden mythology that one early Christian, the Jewish tentmaker, or leather worker Paul (cf. Grant) took his conception of Jesus Christ as the "Last Adam" (Scroggs). He used the imagery to confront a crisis of freedom and domination in the early church.

**Eden Imagery in Early Christianity**

Great tensions were created by the freedom which individuals obtained by joining the early Christian church. In doing so they were emancipated from the traditional mores to which they had been bound. Yet the radical solidarity of the small religious subculture could not easily tolerate such attitudes of freedom, particularly because of the diverse cultural backgrounds represented. Furthermore, specific guidelines for daily life and behavior were lacking. As a new religious movement, Christianity had not yet routinized, through rituals and customs, aspects of daily activity which are detailed in more mature religious and cultural systems. The growing independence of the group from Judaic ritual practices increased uncertainty about such matters.

The Christian church arose at a time of great social turmoil. At the close of the era of Antiquity, two developments were emerging, according to Troeltsch. On the one hand, there was a general destruction of popular religions, and on the other, a new and powerful religious movement due to the mingling of many varied currents of thought. The confrontation of native with foreign religious ideas and practices brought into question the legitimacy of many traditional belief systems and yet created a demand for coherent ways of viewing the world, a demand often met through the amalgamation of cults (Grant). In part, Christians set out to prepare for an expected radical intervention of the deity in human history, by expanding the boundaries of the community beyond its original Jewish context. Membership expansion, the continued prolonging of the expected eschaton, organization difficulties and internal conflicts began to produce significant schisms in the new religious community. The issue of boundary maintenance came to the fore as Christians tried to keep themselves true to their faith in preparation for the expected return of their messiah, and in light of outside religious influences. In grappling with such issues, Paul, a major leader in the efforts to expand the community's membership, turned to the Eden imagery.

In his message to the heterogeneous Christian community at the Greek city of Corinth, a Roman colony located on a major trade route, Paul developed the Eden story. Corinth was a center of considerable religious
activity: on the summit of Acrocorinth, a dominating promontory, was the
temple of Aphrodite. In the center of the city stood a statue of Athena and
the famous temple of Apollo. Many religious associations were devoted to
the popular deities (Conzelmann). Members of the church at Corinth were
primarily from the lower classes (I Cor. 1.26–31), some of them being
slaves, although not necessarily unskilled or uneducated. Some time after
Paul founded the community (ca. 50 A.D.), deep divisions began to de-
velop, and news of the internal struggles came to Paul. Parties formed
within the community, each faction associated with one of the three leaders
with whom the community had had contact—Paul, Apollos, and Cephas.
Although the available information is sketchy, apparently the followers of
Apollos elevated "wisdom," and the Cephas party took a conservative
attitude toward Jewish practices. The thrust of Paul’s letter is not so much
to support one party over another, but rather to oppose the spirit of the
conflict, and to condemn their factionalism as trivial and inappropriate for
members of the new religious community.

J. C. Hurd has suggested that there were several major issues in the
controversy. First, there was a libertarian attitude taken by some members
of the community, contending sexual conduct to be as morally indifferent
as eating. Opposed to them was an ascetic faction which rejected sexual
intercourse even among married individuals. Second, there were emanci-
pation tendencies within the community, among the slaves and women in
particular. In both issues there were sharp differences about the nature of
freedom in the new religion, and the emancipation from (primarily Jewish)
food laws brought another difficulty, related to the heterogeneous mores
brought to the community. Third, there was a debate about one faction’s
emphasis on ecstatic speaking (glossolalia) and finally, there was a schism
over the question of the resurrection of the dead.

Although Paul directly addressed each of a number of issues, he
was all the while hammering away at one major point: strict boundaries
must be drawn between those within the religious community, and the
society outside of the community. He was willing to confront specific con-
troversies, but only within the context of the radical transformation of the
world which was expected at any moment. According to Paul, questions of
individual freedom, class conflicts, and cultural differences dissolve in the
overwhelming impact of the reality of the new religious age. That age was
to reestablish the innocence of the period before the "fall," by means of a
new creation by God. In that context Christians were able to combine, as
Troeltsch pointed out, both the conservative and the revolutionary aspects
of the teachings of Jesus. Paul established firm boundaries between the
religious community (children of the new Adam) and the external world
(children of the old Adam), creating an attitude of indifference to the
external political and social order, leading to conservative attitudes toward
the state and society. At the same time, an entirely new social order would
be created within the community. The new order would be based on the equality of unworthiness and uniform grace shown by the deity toward all. Political and social conflicts both within and outside of the community were thereby rendered insignificant, paled by the burning religious vision that Paul propagated.

In the fifteenth chapter of the letter, Paul dwells on the theme of resurrection and the future existence, using the Adam mythology "to explain the great issues of anthropology and soteriology in the faith" (Scroggs, 83). Even fear of death was to be exorcised by the symbolic expressions of Paul's writings. "The first man Adam became a living being," Paul quoted from Genesis, adding "the last Adam became a life-giving spirit." He described the transformation by which humanity moves from the physical existence of the present, to the spiritual being of the future life, which will trivialize the squabbles of the nascent community. After the Corinthian crisis abated and Paul was writing to the religious community at Rome, he expanded and developed his Adamic imagery more thoroughly.

PAUL'S LETTER TO ROME

In his letter to a Roman congregation, Paul systematized his soteriology (doctrine of salvation) and attempted to draw boundaries not only between the Christians and the Gentiles (a central problem in the Corinthian church), but also between Christians and non-Christian Jews. His theme in the fifth chapter of the letter was the life of believers, and the two great eras of human existence are brought into focus. By contrasting Adam and Christ, he spoke of the old creation as death, and the new one as life. Just as death spread to all of humanity because of the sin of one man (Adam), so the righteousness of one man (Jesus) brings acquittal and life for all (5.12–18).

It was essential, Paul argued, not to allow external influences to exacerbate internal conflicts. The fragmentation of the community was merely a persistence of the effects of the "fall," effects soon to be eradicated. The radical fusion of universalistic individualism by which the individual was freed from the bonds of tradition and family, and the intense social solidarity of the religious community, was a significant cultural development in Western civilization. Individual freedom—similar to that symbolized by Adam and Eve before the "fall"—was to be restored by enabling the individual to join a new social organization voluntarily, leaving other social constraints behind. Paradoxically, the new freedom was to be obtained by voluntary submission to a new social order. The Adam imagery was used by Paul to enhance solidarity among members of the subculture. He attempted to compensate for existing divisions within the community by developing a vision of unity, expressed symbolically with images taken from the Eden saga and interpreted in a new context.

Infused with both the ancient Jewish and the early Christian images
of the Garden of Eden, early American culture developed a new symbolic expression of the mythology, a more secular version of the story which was used to interpret the meaning of the New World.

**America as Eden**

“And so the flower of Eden has bloomed. . . .” Clifford Pyncheon, *The House of the Seven Gables* (Hawthorne, b, 429)

As citizens of the United States entered the nineteenth century, they were sorting out their experiences in the New World, and developing a way of making sense out of their life as a new nation. A dialogue began to form around a comparison of the American experience with the story of the primeval Adam and Eve. It is that attempt to use the Eden saga in developing an American dialogue that R. W. B. Lewis described in his work *The American Adam.*

American cultural expressions had to enhance adaptation to a new wilderness environment. Americans? were rebels from the Old World fashioning their new world in the newly discovered Western continent. The significance of the new currents of social thought emanating from the Industrial and French Revolutions grew in the New World. The burning of the Bastille and the flight to the Americas were both part of a movement in Western thought to free the individual from medieval social structures. The American imagery of the ideal human created an “individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry; . . . an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling” (Lewis, 5). If the French Revolution and European industrialization were uprooting individuals from corporate structures, the process of immigration produced an individualism even more radical.

Although attempts to emancipate the individual were not as successful as some had expected (cf. Shils), there was a great deal of interest in the possibilities of individualism. Those who migrated to America, although they became dependent on new social structures even before landing in American harbors, sought a radical break with their past. They were often attempting to start civilization all over again. Yet, even the radical individualist required a social construction of reality; it was an instance of the “Walden Pond phenomenon,” the public sharing of a private vision. What is the use of being a radical individualist if one doesn’t tell others about it? The American mythological construction often involved a return to that story about the world’s first individuals, Adam and Eve.

American literary figures of the nineteenth century had a task not unlike the ancient Hebrew Yahwist, who collected freely circulating traditions (von Rad) and wove them into a narrative that helped the Hebrews
create an image of who they were. Drawing not only on the Yahwist's account, but also on popular versions of the Eden story, Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century began the process of weaving the conflicts and debates of American life into the narrative of the ancient saga of the Garden of Eden. The new garden was located on the American frontier.

THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

American historians have long debated the importance of the frontier in the shaping of American life and thought. It was Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, presented at the American Historical Association meeting in Chicago in 1893 that sparked the controversy. With the end of the frontier, Turner contended, was coming the end of the most important factor in the creation of American cultural orientations (Hofstadter; Turner). The New World imagery of the early colonists had a religious-mission flavor (cf. Erikson) that reemerged with the great migrations from the industrializing east toward the new lands of the west.

In the nineteenth century, the United States entered a period of rapid industrialization on the one hand, and western movement on the other. Between 1820 and 1837 investment in American industry jumped from $50 to $250 million. Chicago saw a population increase from 500 to 4,000 between 1830 and 1840, and land prices there rose from $1.25 an acre in 1830 to $3.50 an acre four years later (Miller). Ironically, although it had been industrialization that had freed the individual from feudal, agrarian social and economic structures, the American image of freedom was a predominantly agrarian vision. The hero of the New World was the self-reliant individual, carving a personal niche out of the wilderness. The colonist, the settler, the frontiersman, were all part of isolated rural cultures, often more restrictive than the feudal systems of preindustrial Europe. The vastness of the land, however, and the political vision of individual liberty, supported beliefs in the supremacy of the rugged individual.

The rise of the economic importance of the west was paralleled by a rise of the frontier strata in the political structure of the nation. The War Hawks movement in Congress in 1811 was western-initiated, leading to the War of 1812. General Jackson ("Old Hickory") was elected from the frontier as President of the United States in 1828, a political coup against the more industrialized urban strata of the eastern states, and a social movement with a strong individualistic basis. With the rapid expansions of western lands following the Louisiana Purchase (in 1803) came renewed opportunities to recapture the America that was being lost to the industrialized urban strata, just as Thoreau could move to Walden Pond to recover the individualism which progress was allegedly eradicating. Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin and his rationalization of the production process in the eighteenth century led to hundreds of textile factories by the time of
the War of 1812, and a change in the character of the northeast. Life in the frontier was romanticized by intellectuals in the east, who warned their compatriots about the loss of American purity that accompanied the changes. Symbolic representations of America as the Garden of Eden were created, in part, by eastern intellectuals to compensate for the loss of eastern agrarian innocence.

Rising side by side were two quite different visions of America: one, an agrarian vision of the New World as a place for emancipation from industrialized European social institutions and norms, and the other a new vision of America as a powerful industrial nation, with a rich urban culture and a worldwide trade system. The first vision was elaborated by the literary figures associated with Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson and others. America as a new Garden of Eden implied an economic policy of developing agriculture rather than manufacturing. Benjamin Franklin, for example, felt that free land in the west would lead to continuous expansion, high wages, and an agrarian economy with dependence on England for manufacturing products. Opposition to that vision came from Calvinist clergy, whose power was threatened by both movements, and from industrialists. Although the latter were advocates of a certain type of individualism themselves, their position was not central in the cultural debate of the period.

PARTIES OF HOPE AND OF MEMORY

The cultural dialogue of which Lewis has written can be dated to approximately 1820–40 (Emerson, a) or 1820–60 (Lewis). The location of the literary activity was primarily New England and the Atlantic seaboard. The New World meant the possibility of recovering a primordial innocence for what Emerson called the "Party of Hope." For persons like Walt Whitman—poet and "chanter of Adamic songs"—the shortcomings of the human race in the past were irrelevant and inapplicable to the context of the New World. "And now," observes Adam in Hawthorne's "Earth's Holocaust," "we must again try to discover what sort of a world this is, and why we have been sent hither" (b, 14). The attempt to create answers to American questions of meaning and purpose turned the Eden story into a paradigm of life in the American wilderness. The emphasis of the Hopeful was on such themes as unity with nature, rugged individualism and innocence. The "American Adam" was the solitary innocent in the uncorrupted wilderness, in Emerson's words, "the plain old Adam, the simple genuine self against the whole world."

Attempts to realize the potential of the American setting as a Garden of Eden were carried by idealistic participants in numerous communal experiments that flourished during the period. One community, founded at Mountain Cove, West Virginia in 1851, claimed that their site was actual-
ly Eden’s original location (Hayden). Emerson, William Ellery Channing and others were themselves related to the commune Brook Farm, described in Hawthorne’s novel, *The Blithdale Romance*, in which there were many explicit references to Eden.

In addition to the literary proponents of the Eden saga, there were also Unitarian Hopefuls. Having gained considerable prestige in the Boston and Harvard religious milieu, the Unitarians began early in the century to develop further their progressive theology which pushed the notion of the optimistic New Adam even further. In a sermon on “Unitarian Christianity” in Baltimore in 1819, Channing proclaimed the “One Great Principle” of Christianity to be the doctrine of human perfectability (Ahlstrom, a, 29). Similar sentiments were proclaimed by Emerson in his famous “Divinity School Address” at Harvard in 1838. Emerson and his cohorts were “more responsible than Eleanor Porter for Pollyanna’s prominence in the American pantheon” (Ahlstrom, a, 29).

Politically, the Eden imagery of America meant a breaking with past political institutions and looking to westward expansion as part of a garden utopia. In an attempt to capture the support of the farmers of the Northwest Territory, the Republican party supported the Homestead Act which provided free land for settlers in the west, an act lauded as a means for easing the burden of working people in the east. George Henry Evans of the New York Workingmen’s party argued that westward expansion would attract unemployed laborers from industrial cities and reduce the surplus labor there, resulting in higher wages and more plentiful jobs (Smith). For the Party of Hope, then—the literary hopeful, political progressives, communitarians, agrarian proponents and the Unitarian clergy—the symbol for an American social identity should be the innocent Adam, “a radically new personality, the hero of the new adventure; an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and defiled by the usual inheritances of family and race” (Lewis, 5).

The Party of Hope was one side of the dialogue. On the other was the Party of Memory, concerned with the extent to which individuals were not free, but subordinated under the authority of institutions and sustained by such notions as the orthodox Calvinist doctrine of inherited guilt. The Calvinists, too, turned to the Eden story to legitimate their position in society and to deny the legitimacy of the Hopeful. Protecting their declining status in the northeast, the Calvinists argued that the Adamists had missed the most basic presupposition necessary for the comprehension of the nature of humanity—the “fall.” The Memory party remembered Eden primarily for the fall of humanity, interpreting the symbolism of the story in that light. Two radically different views of human existence in the New World proceeded from an orientation toward the same symbolic saga, which contained a resolution of the conflict. The conflict between the two parties was a conflict between those who emphasized the importance of
individual freedom in the political and social arrangements of the New World, and those who emphasized the need for the subordination of individuals under the authority of the church (the Calvinist clergy), the state (political conservatives), or other institutions (including slavery). Various groups attempted to develop some control over the direction of the conflict and were able to express their positions symbolically and to legitimate their statuses in American society, with reference to the Eden story.

The central cultural issue was how to respond to an emerging industrial society, and both sides of the cultural dialogue were responding to that issue. The difference between the Hopeful and Memory parties was their evaluation of the future of American culture, a difference precipitated by different views of the nature of humanity and the relationship between the individual and social institutions. Symbolic expression of the debate continued to focus on the agrarian vision of American individualism, but the dialogue was being carried out primarily in the industrializing northeast. Many felt a nostalgia for the individualism and economic independence of agrarian America, and the industrialized northeast was too reminiscent of the urbanism of Europe. The tension between the urbaniy of civilization (a necessary evil for the Hopeful intellectuals) and the freedom-granting expanse of the frontier, was not fully resolved. For the Hopeful, the Eden imagery symbolized the innocence of the New World, but the literary Hopeful rather than moving to the wilderness, dreamt and wrote about it. The Hopeful were optimistic about the creation of an urban culture with a rural flavor. In his celebrated Leaves of Grass, for example, Walt Whitman combined the agrarian and industrial images, rejecting at the same time the Puritan sexual ethic:

I, chanter of Adamic songs,
Through the new garden, the West,
the great cities, calling,
Deliriate, thus prelude what is generated, offering these,
offering myself,
Bathing myself, bathing my songs in sex,
Offspring of my loins (Whitman, 233).

The innocent American was not in need of restraining social institutions. It was not the nature of humanity, but of social institutions that corrupted, and the New World individual, a participant in the progress of free enterprise, could begin life anew.

The cultural dialogue which focused on the Eden symbols enabled diverse forces in the newly formed and rapidly changing American society to debate the nature of humanity and the appropriateness of certain social institutions, with reference to a common set of symbols. Relations of conflict, however, as Simmel pointed out do not by themselves produce a social structure, but only in cooperation with unifying forces. There were both symbolic and concrete social forces moving the parties of the debate
toward such a unity. The frontier and industrial forces were united by a developing economic system, facilitated by the railroad and other technical developments. The Eden story itself provided some basis for symbolic resolution of the conflicts. Common symbols alone, of course, do not create conflict resolution, either (note contemporary conflicts among Leninists, Trotskyites, Maoists, etc.). But they can sometimes open the way for a synthesis of conflicting elements. As Levi-Strauss has suggested, cultural expressions often contain within themselves the symbolic resolution of basic polarities. The key to that resolution in the Eden saga was what Lewis called the idea of the "fortunate Fall"—i.e., the definition of aspects of the "fall" as positive. The Hopeful's vision of progress in America was not the static pre-fall Eden after all, but a dynamic process-filled vision. As Henry James the Elder put it, "nothing can indeed be more remote (except in pure imagery) from distinctly human attributes, or from the spontaneous life of man, than this sleek and comely Adamic condition" (121).

As early as 1828 writers like Nathaniel Taylor, at Calvinist Yale, began to modify the position of the Calvinist reaction against the innocent Adam motif. The idea of an Eden story as progress through tragedy to restored innocence was represented in literary images in Melville's *Billy Budd*, as well as in Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (Hawthorne, a; Lewis). The human personality is finally fulfilled, Horace Bushnell contended, only after the entire drama of the fall and subsequent regeneration. Both sides of the American character—its innocence and limitations alike—were encompassed. To many, the social order of the New World had the character of a new creation, but it was nonetheless riddled with problems of European urban industrial society. American free enterprise capitalism, with its emphasis on the self-reliant entrepreneur, was legitimated by a Panglossian vision of salvation through individual effort and struggle similar to the Puritan ethic of work and frugality. The innocence of American capitalism allegedly needed neither the workers' revolts of European socialism, nor the ecclesiastical constraints of Calvinism. If the factory worker was dissatisfied, he or she could always "go West." As with James Fenimore Cooper's old hunter Leatherstocking, later popularized in Beadle's dime novels, the American Adam and Eve were at the same time symbolic of anarchic freedom and the social order's domination, the tension not being resolved, but continued in the legend of individuals struggling for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Daniel Boone, as one version of the story put it, was chosen by the Spirit of Enterprise,

To scatter knowledge through the Heathen wilds,
And mend the state of Universal Man!—
By Duty's stern but salutary voice. . . . (Bryan, 59)
Effects of Culture in Boundary Maintenance

Because cultural expressions have been significant in historical processes of forming and maintaining forms of social organization, many sociologists have examined the nature of cultural forms and institutions, and their relationships to social action. The landmark of such investigations remains, of course, Max Weber's encyclopedic studies of the world's religions and socio-economic orders, which continue to provide the major intellectual agenda and point of reference for cultural sociology. If one is to reap the insights of Weber's sociology, however, one must examine in a comparative, historical fashion, the effects of ideas in history, as they become associated with the interests of various social strata. The approach taken in this paper leads to some conclusions about how the appropriation of cultural forms by social groups, for the process of boundary maintenance, is accomplished.

The role which the manipulation of cultural symbols plays in the maintenance of boundaries is primarily a definitional role. How are the boundaries of a society or social group to be defined and symbolically represented? Such definitions are often created via negativa, a process noted in post-Saussurian linguistics. That is, we are not like them in particular ways, differences which are often implicit and yet which become more explicit as they are expressed symbolically in times of conflict. Conflict management by social strata or elites often centers around the process of defining which beliefs and life styles are ideally adhered to by members of a society, and which are not. Consequently, decisions can be made about which groups of people are appropriately within the boundaries on the basis of their adherence to certain values, beliefs, and life-style preferences.

Following Durkheim's notions of how social solidarity is maintained, Kai Erikson has demonstrated that the most effective means of maintaining social boundaries often include the creation of conflicts which accentuate the differences between what is defined as constituting a particular social identity, and what is not permissible. Forces within a society may even create (sometimes inadvertently) a certain amount of deviance, which is then accentuated as an example of how people within the society are not to think or to act. Such was the fate of the "wayward Puritans" singled out to provide examples of inadmissible behavior (Erikson).

The creation of conflict is not, of course, the only means by which social groups can respond to times of crisis. The crisis can sometimes be diminished through a reorganization of aspects of the society, with new status arrangements and collective goals that legitimate the protest of disdient individuals or groups. Alternatively, there can be a reaffirmation of the status quo, in which current status arrangements are reinforced and rebelling groups repelled or expelled. Or, there can be a return to an earlier state (a golden age, for example), or some combination of those alternatives. Symbolic expressions in efforts to maintain social solidarity are often
aimed at compensating for indicators of fragmentation in the social order. They may take the form of utopian thinking, using symbols already present in the culture to create models for such utopias. The Eden story provided the material for such a model in ancient Jewish, early Christian, and early American cultures. Discussions of that saga helped to define the nature of the ideal community, its relationship to the society or social group in question, requirements for membership in the utopia, and possible means to its actualization.

The utopian models of Eden examined in this paper came into their own at times of social crisis, in which social solidarity was significantly weakened. As summarized in Table 1, ancient Judaism, early Christian and early American societies were undergoing transformations which precipitated the erosion of social integration. Ancient Jewish society had been held together by the religious covenant, the berith, and the cult in which the notions of the berith were institutionalized. Both the development of a monarchical polity and the rise of an urban patriciate contributed to the transfer of authority from the cultic institutions to political and economic elites, who ignored or exploited large segments of the social order. Early Christianity, originally a tightly knit group of Jewish individuals, expanded its boundaries, creating a heterogeneous membership. Jewish rituals and belief systems were no longer appropriate for defining the behavioral and doctrinal parameters of the community once its membership was no longer predominantly Jewish.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Context</th>
<th>Events Precipitating Crises</th>
<th>Cultural Crises</th>
<th>Social Crises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Ancient Jewish</td>
<td>Establishment of the Monarchy</td>
<td>Secularization of norms</td>
<td>Breakdown of religious/cultural institutions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Increasing domination by the urban patriciate</td>
<td>Breakdown of rural tribal culture</td>
<td>Conflict: political and cultic elites</td>
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<td>Class conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Early Christian</td>
<td>Break from Jewish rituals</td>
<td>Soteriological controversies</td>
<td>Breakdown of consensus rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heterogeneity and fragmentation</td>
<td>Conflict with non-Christian religions</td>
<td>Dissidence and authoritative response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Early American</td>
<td>Immigration to &quot;New World&quot;</td>
<td>Conflict: Calvinism vs. progressive individualism</td>
<td>Breakdown of European social arrangements</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Break with Old World culture and society</td>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict: urban industrialized strata and frontier strata</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rise of frontier strata</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Industrialization of American economy</td>
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A twofold process affected the creation of an early American culture. First, the process of immigration to the New World resulted in a break with Old World norms and institutions. Although many immigrated with groups of significant others intact—families and religious communities, for example—the question of how much previous norms and social arrangements were applicable in the New World became a crucial issue. Second, earlier religious visions of the New World as a haven for religious groups had begun to fade, especially as the character of rural New England was transformed by population increases and rapid industrialization of the economy. At the same time, the opening of the west to settlers resulted in an opportunity to renew the vision of the New World, and yet led to a challenge of the northeastern urban establishment by the frontier strata.

In all three instances there was a shift from a more Gemeinschaftlich to a more Gesellschaftlich society (Tönnies), with increasing heterogeneity and division of labor challenging the existing social order. As summarized in Table 2, the themes in the Eden story were used by status groups or individuals to respond to the erosion of social solidarity. If attempts to manage conflict are viewed as falling along a continuum from efforts to increase conflict within a society, to efforts to lessen those conflicts, we find

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Context</th>
<th>Freedom (\text{&quot;Innocence in the Garden&quot;})</th>
<th>Domination (\text{&quot;After the A.})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Ancient Jewish</td>
<td>Wealthy urban patriciate (detachment from aspects of the berith through privileges of wealth)</td>
<td>Concept of the berith --prophets, peasants (subordination under cultic institutions) --political elite (subordination under the state)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Early Christian</td>
<td>Members of the new religious community (as differentiated from non-Christians) Libertarian and Emancipation factions within the community</td>
<td>All persons outside of the community Subordination of members under the lordship of the deity Conservative factions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Early American</td>
<td>Party of Hope --Literary hopeful (Whitman, Emerson) --Political progressives --Unitarian clergy --Communitarians --Frontier proponents</td>
<td>Party of Memory --Calvinist clergy (&quot;inherited guilt&quot; doctrine) --Political conservatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that the Eden saga was appropriated in different ways in the three cases examined in this paper. In both the Jewish and Christian settings, efforts were made to lessen conflicts within the society, although with slightly different effects. In the Jewish context the saga was introduced primarily by cultic figures attempting to emphasize the importance of the cult and the unity of the Israelites. The emphasis in the religious traditions on the subordination of all Jewish people under the berith and the importance of the non-urban classes in Jewish history, tended to exacerbate conflicts between the plebeian and patrician strata, a conflict later expressed in the teachings of the prophets. The more immediate effect of the Yahwist writings, therefore, may have been to increase conflict (an unintended consequence), although in the long run those writings served as a central focus of Jewish social solidarity. In early Christianity, on the other hand, the story was not used by a cultic figure who was losing authority, but by one whose prestige was high. Paul’s writings were also intended to decrease conflict among the factions within his community, and he was apparently somewhat successful.

In early American cultural debates, the Eden saga was used to initiate a conflict. The Hopeful mounted a twofold attack—against the direction in which urban industrialization was changing the nation, on the one hand, and against Calvinist attempts to restore Puritan America on the other. Because the Eden imagery became the center of an intense debate over the nature of humanity and the types of institutions required by the New World society, the saga became a vehicle for expressing conflict, actually intensifying it, but providing some symbolic resolution of the tensions.

Despite the different ways in which internal conflict was used in the three settings, there were efforts to sharpen the demarcation between members of the society and those outside of it. Transformation of the social order from more tightly knit, homogeneous communities, to more heterogeneous communities, was accompanied by an increased sense of freedom for individuals. In each instance efforts were made to increase solidarity within the society by comparing it with other social orders, Jew and Gentile, Christian and non-Christian, New World and Old World. The decisive factors determining how such boundary maintenance processes affect conflicts within society are the ways in which a set of symbols is used, by which groups, and to what ends. Forms of cultural expression are always deeply enmeshed in patterns of social interaction, and the interests of particular groups, or of an entire society, can become identified with and expressed symbolically through a particular myth, legend, or belief system. The set of symbols can be fashioned into what Weber called a “status legend,” which serves to legitimate the life style, belief system, and status of a social group. One other way in which the Garden of Eden saga has been used as a status legend which I have unfortunately not been able to explore in this brief treatment, is its use by males to legitimate male
domination of females (it was Eve, according to the story, who was first responsible for the eating of the forbidden fruit).

Such status legends may or may not reflect certain realities of the group’s situation, and they often compensate for real or imagined deprivations of a group. Thus, a form of symbolic expression is often compensatory not only by positing unity when there is fragmentation, but also by positing the high status of a group that is relatively peripheral. The compensatory role of status legends may also be found in such instances as the emphasis on individual freedom in the New World, where individuals were in fact quite dependent. The frontier, despite its romanticized reputation, was a harsh environment in which people depended heavily on their families and neighbors, particularly before the mechanization of farming made it possible for a person to cultivate a large acreage, alone. A change in the form of dependency created a subjective sense of independence.

Cultural expressions, moreover, often reflect the status of the creators of culture, who are often in conflict with crucial aspects of the dominant society. The Yahwist, for example was somewhat outside the mainstream of Israelitic society, and wrote from a perspective of a unity that did not exist. Early American intellectuals who elaborated the Eden theme did so from a standpoint of ambiguity toward the industrial progress of their society. The content of cultural symbols, therefore, often reflects the attitudes and positions of the literary strata who shape it, while it compensates for perceived deficiencies in the social order. Culture has a dual nature, both reflecting the realities of a society and compensating for its deficiencies. Discussions of whether culture is socially determined or whether it actually affects social action or initiates changes in the social structure (whether it is an independent or a dependent variable) often run far afield of the complex way in which cultural forms and forms of social organization interact.

Daniel Bell may be right in asserting that modern culture fundamentally contradicts the capitalist structure of modern society. It is not, however, because culture has a new role in capitalist societies, or that it has come unhinged from the social and economic order. Culture has always been caught between its compensatory and its reflective natures, between its legitimating and its critical roles. Culture may emphasize one or another of its aspects in a particular historical period, depending on the circumstances in which it appears, the relationship of intellectuals and other shapers of culture to political and economic elites, and the position of status groups which find meaning in symbols that legitimize their styles of life, beliefs, and values.

Furthermore, facile distinctions between unity and conflict, and culture’s part in maintaining social boundaries, mitigating and intensifying conflicts, must be reexamined. Cultural expressions play an important role in a complex, dynamic process that includes both conflict and cooperation as integral aspects of the social order. As Simmel (b) contended,
Just as the universe needs love and hate, that is, attractive and repulsive forces, in order to have any form at all, so society, too, in order to attain a determinate shape, needs some quantitative ratio of harmony and disharmony, of association and competition, of favorable and unfavorable tendencies. But these discords are by no means mere sociological liabilities or negative instances. Definite, actual society does not result only from other social forces which are positive, and only to the extent that the negative factors do not hinder them. This common conception is quite superficial. Society, as we know it, is the result of both categories of interaction, which thus both manifest themselves as wholly positive (72).

Notes

1. "Boundary maintenance" is used here in the sense developed by Erikson.
2. The two poles characterizing interaction are not harmony and conflict, both of which are forms of sociation, but rather sociation on the one hand, and not even knowing one another on the other (Simmel).
3. The central value system here refers to the general standards of judgment and action inherent in the decisions made by the elites, and constituting the central zone of the society (Shils).
4. Part of the difficulty I have encountered here is related to the spatial constraints of a journal article, which simply does not allow an extended empirical treatment of each period.
5. Heated controversies of the nineteenth century concerning the way in which the scriptures were written have not been fully resolved. Critical theories of multiple authorship of the Pentateuch remain controversial; for a summary of the debate, see Sellin and Fohrer, and Harrison. Considerable revisions have taken place since the landmark "Graf-Wellhausen" hypothesis of the mid-nineteenth century, many of them correcting for extremes of interpretation by early positivists, and recognizing the importance and reliability of oral traditions. The view taken here, that the "Books of Moses" were edited at the time of David and Solomon does not imply that the traditions were not formulated at a much earlier time. Moreover, had Moses actually written the Eden saga himself, the argument about the role of the saga in strengthening social solidarity in a time of crisis might be even more convincing. Similarly, if the saga was not written until as late as the time of the exile, the thrust of my argument would still be relevant.
6. Note that the juxtaposition of the terms "Jew" and "Gentile" expresses emphatic boundaries between in-group and out-group relationships that are sharply defined in Jewish culture.
7. That is the American as a "historical individual" in Weber's sense of the term—an ideal typical construction whose characteristics might be only partially present in any given individual.
8. That is the role of culture to which Marx referred when he developed his analogy of the "camera obscura" image, in which a form of culture (in that case, the German ideology) presents an inverted picture of social reality.
9. It should be noted, however, that the mechanization of agriculture, while granting a measure of independence to the farmer, has nonetheless increased rural dependence on an urban economy in all matters from the acquisition of machinery and seed, to the distribution of agricultural products. That dependence has fanned the flames of anti-urbanism in American culture.
10. See Saul Bellow's essay in Ben-David and Clark; I am also indebted to Steven Dubin for a discussion on this matter.

References


