

the economic critique of Madison in conversation with Madison's argument about deliberative legislatures and citizens, and this is no small task. Madison *was* interested in protecting property rights but not to secure some elite privilege in the face of the democratic rabble; rather the promotion of a commercial republic was seen as the best way to secure a public good. The question for modern times is whether Madison's vision can be realized given the changes that Elkin rightly emphasizes.

In Chapter 5, Elkin sets out the core of his argument for the definition of the public interest within a commercial republic. Elkin argues that there is no way to defend *any* institutional arrangement unless one defends it by reference to the public interest. Even the institutions that give rise to pluralism are rooted in the public interest: They are defended by the claim that the public interest is best defined by the outcome of competition among interest groups over scarce resources. The public interest will also include a concern for the private sphere.

Chapters 6 and 7 offer a description of what public interest politics would look like in providing guidance for reform. Elkin focuses on the legislature because only "the legislature can be deliberative in its workings and have the breadth of vision to consider the whole of the public interest" (p. 160). Elkin sees that the transformation of a democratic legislature into a republican deliberative sphere animated by the courageous and the historically minded depends upon a transformation of democratic citizens themselves. Chapter 7 thus suggests developing their "public spiritedness" (p. 180) by cultivating in citizens six kinds virtues (p. 183): 1) realizing that public and private interests are not necessarily the same, 2) a "measure of proud independence," 3) "trust in other citizens," 4) the capacity for judgment, 5) respect for other citizens, and 6) a concern that they be esteemed for their capacities as public reasoners. This list is surely worth endorsing; the question is whether it is realistically achievable.

This in turn brings back the commercial feature of Elkin's analysis: The content of local politics is currently dominated by wooing and pleasing economically powerful interests and the promotion of the best economic deals. The solution is to expand municipal powers modestly, thus expanding the set of interests that are affected and can be incorporated into deliberation. For example, Elkin supports the idea of allowing local governments to "exercise powers of eminent domain to buy businesses threatening to depart" (p. 199). Such expansion will simultaneously attract local citizens to get involved in local politics, because much more is at stake, and provide greater opportunities for public deliberation about these matters.

Elkin concludes with detailed policy proposals for achieving his view of the American commercial republic (Chapter 10), including "full employment at no less than modestly remunerative wages" to secure the kind of secure and stable middle class necessary for the commercial republic.

His proposals are laudable because they attempt to make sober those "intoxicating visions" offered. As with the rest of the book, politics, economics, and culture are all intertwined; in making them so, Elkin joins a group of theorists who attempt what has been called middle-level political theory, engaged in both the normative (or in Elkin's case "aspirational") and the practical.

Unfortunately, the policy proposals are platitudinal, pitched at a level of generality and without empirical support, ignoring the messy implications that might attend to such innovations. The assumption, for example, that we could design democratic institutions to foster politicians who would be motivated by courage and honor more than narrow self-interest seems unrealistic; the idea that giving local governments the power of eminent domain over businesses that want to relocate may well be worse than the problems it seeks to solve. The problem is that obvious objections are nowhere considered. To give a single illustration: If all local communities had eminent domain, it seems likely that they would try to out maneuver each other in a race to the bottom, signing away that very right to attract businesses. A Coasean equilibrium might emerge, quite likely not much different from what happens today. Communities sell their souls to attract businesses not because they cannot punish them if they leave, but because it would be strategically stupid to do so. Similarly, why should we seek "full employment" rather than a guaranteed income, which has many of the same economic (and stabilizing) benefits as full employment without as much loss of efficiency (and freedom) that full employment necessitates?

This is not to say that Elkin is wrong. Just that the policy recommendations are far less persuasive than they need to be for our endorsement. In part, this is surely a consequence of the regime-level analysis that Elkin has undertaken; a result that is one of the great virtues of the book. The book is thus most successful in advocating for a reengagement of the public good by putting economics in service to politics through deliberative citizen participation in local politics. This is so whether or not these aspirations are the ones Americans have, whether they can be realized in the way Elkin suggests, or whether, more critically, they are ones worth having at all.

Cultus Americanus: Varieties of the Liberal Tradition in American Political Culture, 1600–1865. By Brent

Gilchrist. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006. 314p. \$80.00.

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— Joseph Romance, *Drew University*

In *Cultus Americanus*, Brent Gilchrist provides an intellectually challenging account of American political culture. In so doing, Gilchrist staunchly defends the notion of a liberal consensus in American political life. However, this is not merely a restatement of Louis Hartz's rightly famous theory. Instead, we are offered a nuanced and thoughtful

analysis of how American culture delineates a “matrix” that reflects the interaction of myth, religion, and ideology. The author goes to great lengths to demarcate the differences and connections among these rich and powerful concepts. In the process, he does an admirable job articulating a fundamental liberalism that is at work in America. Thus, he offers a powerful development of the Hartz thesis and takes on those critics who see that theory as fraught with failings. Indeed, Rogers Smith’s *Civic Ideals* (1997) and *Cultus Americanus* provide the materials for a high-minded debate about how American politics was shaped in the past and how our history continues to shape the present. This book will be of interest to those interested in American political history and thought, religion, and politics, as well as to theorists in general.

Gilchrist opens his book with a discussion of the liberal consensus and its critics. At its base, this debate concerns the question of diversity. Is the United States a country that reflects a fundamental diversity in its culture—a reflection of its rich and controversial history of expansive immigration, slavery, and its treatment of indigenous people? If this is the case, that diversity is the hallmark of American life, then how has that shaped its politics and self-understanding? For critics on this side of the discussion this usually means that Americans’ exceptionalism is a facile and unhelpful way to approach politics, because such approaches tend to minimize diversity and place Americans in a kind of political and philosophic straight-jacket that hides us from ourselves. Furthermore, such theories tend to downplay racism and discrimination as significant factors in our history. On the other side of the debate are those who see a great deal of agreement about certain central questions, admire the way new groups are integrated into a culture, and admire how America, in so many ways, looks quite different from other modern democracies. Yet, in defending the notion of a consensus, those who champion the ideal have opened themselves to withering critiques, as various exceptions and unexplainable events intrude upon the consensus theory.

Gilchrist seeks to refurbish the older consensus theory by recognizing that diversity exists; however, “that American diversity does not entail contradictory belief systems” (p. 2). Instead, diversity is at the surface and “American culture can be seen as a complex but unified structure that contains internal diversities within a single universe of Americanism” (p. 2). To appreciate this, we need a renewed and deeper understanding of what political culture means. To gain that we need to acknowledge that culture is a reflection of the interaction of myth, religion, and ideology. Each of these distinct forces work together (sometimes contentiously work) to create a culture that harmonizes what it means to be an American.

To get to this point, Gilchrist writes a dense and philosophically rich chapter heavily influenced by Ernest Cassier. Cassier’s notion of man as a “symbolic animal”

provides a starting place to think about how diversity may reflect a union of people who use and understand those symbols and as such create a culture that forms both individuals and societies. Gilchrist first works to explain what myths mean. Myths are symbols that emerge out of common experiences and articulate higher truths that are timeless and ahistorical. Thus, the mythic America is revealed when Washington becomes Moses and the 13 colonies are seen as the 13 tribes of Israel. The mythic is seen in concepts like Manifest Destiny and the West. However, the mythic is not enough and it necessarily leads to the religious. Religion proves a deeper argument about “the meaning of man, society, and the political” (p. 29). Yet, the mythic remains as part of the “unseen social fabric” (p. 26). However, these two ideals need and nurture each other. Finally, ideology emerges as politics moves to center stage and there is a need to explain important political concepts to a mass of people in some rational form. Ideology is not philosophy but a set of ideas that can easily be communicated to a broad range of citizens. After laying out these ideas and showing how they interact, persist, and shape each other to create a common culture, Gilchrist spends the bulk of the book showing how this process works in America.

This is a rich and thoughtful book, and it adds greatly to the scholarly debate about culture and America. Yet, there are some weaker aspects to the text. Gilchrist certainly provides concrete historical examples to illustrate his points; yet, he often seems more intent on jousting with other political scientists and historians. One would have preferred more examples to show how his theory explains actual history and a bit less critiquing of rivals. Second, his argument about the fundamental consensus in American politics runs into its biggest challenge with regards to the North-South divide that led to the Civil War. Gilchrist does an admirable job showing how John C. Calhoun and others really represent a liberalism that was, at some level, at one with Northern political views. Yet, it does beg the question: If such a basic agreement can lead to slavery in one part of the nation, does a cultural consensus exist? I do not want to dismiss Gilchrist’s argument out of hand, but this is a point that his critics may seize upon.

When read in its entirety, *Cultus Americanus* represents an impressive effort to revitalize the idea of the liberal consensus and a nuanced and subtle essay about the meaning and importance of political culture.

Patriotism and Other Mistakes. By George Kateb. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. 464p. \$35.00.
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— Don Herzog, *University of Michigan*

Readers of George Kateb’s previous work will recognize the author’s familiar voice in this collection of papers from the last 17 years or so. By turns earnest (“I know that I