



POSTHISTORICISM

The end of the end of history

Walter Benn Michaels

What ended when, in 1806 at Jena or in 1991 in Moscow, history ended? This question may seem both tendentious and anachronistic: anachronistic because the article in which Francis Fukuyama raised the question of history’s end already seems, only seven years later, an artifact of a vanished historical moment—“the triumph of the West”—and tendentious because my question—what ended when history ended?—assumes that Fukuyama was right, whereas virtually everyone who has commented on Fukuyama’s thesis has argued that, on the question of the end of history anyway, he was wrong. Indeed, to the charges of anachronism and tendentiousness, a third might be added, disingenuousness, since I myself don’t really mean to argue that Fukuyama was right and that history has ended. What I mean to argue instead is that several of the most important intellectual developments of the last fifteen years—in particular, the rise of a race-based multiculturalism, the critique of that multiculturalism from the standpoint of an

explicitly non-racial (or, as Michael Lind puts it, “trans-racial”) nationalism, and the articulation of an anti-foundationalist epistemology that, I will claim, underwrites that nationalism—have been efforts to imagine a world in which Fukuyama *was* right, a world in which history, as Fukuyama understands it, has in fact ended. So one point of asking what ended when history ended will be to ask what that world looks like. And a second point will be to ask whether that world really is, or could be, the world we live in.

What ended when history ended, according to Fukuyama, was fundamental disagreement over the ideal mode of social organization. The “triumph of the West,” Fukuyama argued, was the triumph of “the Western *idea*,” liberal democracy. So, insofar as the failure of communism left no plausible alternatives to liberal democracy as an *idea*—insofar, that is, as it might be imagined that no one was any longer arguing for the theoretical superiority of socialism to capitalism—what might properly be called

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ideological conflict was over. And, although Fukuyama's thesis was met with instantaneous and overwhelming skepticism and, although it is perfectly obvious that conflict (both in the U.S. and abroad) has hardly ended since history did, there is an obvious sense also in which both the skepticism and the terms of that continuing conflict tend to be described in ways that confirm Fukuyama's thesis.

Arthur Schlesinger Jr., for example, begins *The Disuniting of America* by remarking that "the fading away of the cold war has brought an era of ideological conflict to an end. But it has not, as forecast, brought an end to history." Indeed, because the "disappearance of ideological competition in the third world removes superpower restraints on national and tribal confrontations," the world is in some respects a "more dangerous" place than before. Schlesinger's point here is not just that the superpowers no longer police the third world—he has almost no interest in the third world—but that the ideological victory of the West makes possible "confrontations" that are no longer themselves ideological and that are just as likely to take place in the first and second worlds as they are in the third. If, in other words, the only thing that kept the Soviet Union together was the ideological commitment to communism, now that the ideological commitment to capitalism has ceased to be distinctive—now that, as Fukuyama says, *everybody's* a capitalist—what will keep the United States together?

It is only because communism has ceased to be a problem that multiculturalism, as Schlesinger sees it, has become

one. And, by the same token, it is only because communism has ceased to be a solution that multiculturalism has become that too. Both Schlesinger and his opponents, that is, share Fukuyama's sense of the new irrelevance of ideological struggle; in Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Almanac of the Dead* (published, like *The Disuniting of America*, in 1991, and representing that disuniting literally as a revolution of "the indigenous peoples of the Americas" against their European conquerors), the revolution is led by Indians who explicitly dissociate it from any "political party" or Marxist "ideology." ("The Indians couldn't care less about international Marxism.") In fact, in as dramatic a repudiation of the ideal of communism as Fukuyama could imagine, Silko's Indians execute the Cuban Marxist who has been sent to help them organize. Tired of being instructed in Marxist doctrine and tired, in particular, of hearing Comrade Bartolomeo criticize their own "tribalism" as "the whore of nationalism and the dupe of capitalism," they hang him.

Fukuyama calls such non-Marxist conflicts "post-historical": they may, as Schlesinger fears and Silko hopes, pose a threat to the United States, but they pose no threat to liberal capitalism. Only Marxism could do this, because only Marxism challenged liberal capitalism's status as an ideal, its understanding of itself as a social system without "fundamental" contradictions and so immune in principle to the supersession that had overtaken previous social systems. According to Marx, insofar as capitalism was based on a class structure, it necessarily produced inequality and conflict, and thus contained within itself the seeds

of its own transformation into something else—communism. So capitalism's ability to outlast communism proves, Fukuyama thinks, that Marx was wrong; there is no "fundamental contradiction" in capitalism, "the class issue has been successfully resolved," and, in fact, "the egalitarianism of modern America"—precisely because it "represents the essential achievement of the classless society envisioned by Marx"—represents the end of contradiction and the end of history.

The essential claim here is that "the class issue" has been "resolved"; only if that claim is true can the Marxist critique of capitalism be dismissed. In dismissing it, Fukuyama doesn't need to say that actually existing capitalism has solved the problem of economic inequality—and indeed he doesn't say it; he does not say that "there are not rich people and poor people in the United States, or that the gap between them has not grown in recent years." What he does say is that "the root causes of economic inequality do not have to do with the underlying legal and social structure of our society." In actually existing capitalism, in other words, there are inequalities, but capitalism does not in principle require such inequalities and does not itself cause them. At the end of history, there will be no such inequalities; insofar as we have already arrived at the end of history, their persistence must thus be understood not as "the inherent product of liberalism" but as "the historical legacy of premodern conditions."

What this means is that Marxism was wrong in describing capitalism as a class system, and that what look to the Marxist like class differences produced by cap-

italism are in fact differences between "groups" inherited from essentially pre-capitalist and pre-liberal stages of history. Thus, for example, "black poverty in the United States is not the inherent product of liberalism, but is rather the 'legacy of slavery and racism' which persisted long after the formal abolition of slavery." Blacks, on this analysis, do not belong to an economic class whose exploitation is a function of "the social structure of our society" (if they did, then Marx would be right and liberal capitalism, as historically dominant as it currently may be, would not be the culmination of history); they belong instead to a "group" whose "cultural and social characteristics" are an "historical legacy." And the principles of capitalism will eventually make those characteristics—and the groups they define—disappear.

The defeat of Marxism, then, is only incidentally the defeat of actually existing socialism and the triumph of actually existing liberalism; it is essentially the defeat of the idea of Marxism, and what this means in Fukuyama is the defeat of the Marxist idea of the class struggle and, indeed, of the Marxist idea of class. Whatever Fukuyama's "groups" are, they aren't classes, and when, in Silko, "the people" execute the Cuban Marxist Bartolomeo, they are not a class either. Indeed, it is precisely because the Cuban keeps insisting on the primacy of economic analysis and keeps refusing to acknowledge the relevance of the Indians' historical struggles (he won't listen to their five-hundred-year chronology of European oppression and Indian resistance) that the revolutionaries feel compelled to get rid of him. "Comrade Bartolomeo . . . has no use for indigenous

history. Comrade Bartolomeo denies the holocaust of indigenous Americans.” What Silko calls “crimes against history” are crimes against the “people” because, in Silko, the “people” are as little a product of the economy and as much a product of history as Fukuyama’s “groups,” which is to say that both Silko and Fukuyama are anti-Marxist insofar as they both regard present inequalities as a function not of contemporary liberal capitalism but of events that are themselves historical. But where Fukuyama wants to get rid of the historical legacy, Silko wants to reclaim it. In Fukuyama, it is history, not capitalism, that victimizes blacks—hence Marx was wrong; in Silko, it is history, not socialism, that will redeem the Indians—hence Comrade Bartolomeo must die.

But if, in liberalism, the “people” are neither an ideological entity nor an economic one, what are they? They cannot be an ideological entity because, with the defeat of Marxism, one people can-

The undeniable fact that people’s belief in the biological reality of race has real consequences does not suffice to make race real

not be distinguished from another people on the basis of ideology—properly ideological differences no longer exist. They cannot be an economic entity because, with the defeat of Marxism, the Marxist characterization of class as liberal capitalism’s constituent element has been discredited—the differences that matter are not fundamentally economic. It might then be imagined that the tri-

umph of liberalism makes the differences between peoples irrelevant; this is the view that Michael Lind attributes to those whom he calls “democratic universalists,” among whom he would count Fukuyama himself. But Lind himself insists that Americans are “a single people,” different as a people from other peoples, and, as Schlesinger and Silko make clear, the real effect of the end of history has not been to get rid of difference but to transform it, to replace the differences between what people think (ideology) and the differences between what people own (class) with the differences between what people are (identity). Only at the end of history can all politics become identity politics.

One way to understand this theoretical repudiation of economics and ideology is as a theoretical commitment to race. As vehement as Silko’s revolutionary heroine is in her denunciation of Marxism, she is even more vehement in her admiration for Marx “the man,” whom she thinks of as Marx “the tribal man,” “Marx of the Jews.” Marx the Marxist taught that men belonged to classes; Marx “the tribal Jew” himself belongs to a race. But this simple substitution of race for class is obviously too simple, since almost none of the writers engaged in the project of imagining the posthistorical means to be committed to the biological category of race. Indeed, several of these writers regard themselves as hostile to a politics based on biological race and understand the whole point of their work to consist in its critique of such a politics. Even in *Almanac of the Dead*, the idea that there is “a strict biological order to the natural world” which can be obeyed only by keeping blood-

lines “pure” and maintaining “proper genetic balance” is associated with an insane white supremacist. Outside of *The Bell Curve* and its apologists, almost nowhere in contemporary American intellectual life can one find any support for a biologically based racialism.

At the same time, however, hostility to a racial biologism does not necessarily imply hostility to the primacy of racial categorization. Racial anti-essentialists deny that there is any biological reality to race but deny also—indeed often denounce—the idea that because race is not a biological reality, it is not a reality. It is, as Howard Winant says, a “social fact,” by which he means that people acting as if race were real makes it real, and he repeatedly quotes the sociologist W. I. Thomas’s assertion that, if people “define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” The goal of a truly “radical democracy,” Winant argues, should be to attack racism not by attacking the reality of race but by “accept[ing] and celebrat[ing]” “racial difference.”

I have argued elsewhere (most explicitly in a piece called “The No-Drop Rule”) against the effort to defend race as a social construct. The undeniable fact that people’s belief in the biological reality of race has real consequences does not suffice to make race real; women, as Tzvetan Todorov reminds us, were hanged as witches, and yet there were no witches. Which is only to say that false beliefs can be as consequential as true ones without thereby becoming true. So the nonbiological reality of race cannot be adduced as a consequence of people’s mistaken belief in its biological reality, and without some positive account of what a nonbiological race might be,

anti-essentialist celebrants of racial difference are condemned to resorting to the biological categories they mean to repudiate. In Silko, for example, the term most often deployed to designate the rightful owners of the Americas is geographical rather than biological—they are “indigenous,” and, inspired by the example of Africa, “armies of indigenous people” all over the world are gearing up to take back their land. But the very idea of this struggle between the indigenous armies and those whom Silko calls the “Europeans” suggests its racial implications; after all, none of the Europeans was actually born in Europe. And when the “all-tribal people’s army” makes plans to offer deserters from the U.S. Army “safe conduct to Oslo or Stockholm,” “indigenous” emerges in its completely racialized form; only if indigeneness is genetic can some people born in the Americas count as native and other people born in the Americas count as Nordic.

Silko, then, ends up committed to a more or less straightforward ethnonationalism, a position that is hardly available to a writer like Schlesinger (for whom tribal is a pejorative epithet) or to a writer like Lind (who looks forward to the elimination of racial difference through miscegenation). Schlesinger and Lind, in other words, are nationalists, not ethnonationalists; indeed, what Lind calls “liberal nationalism” is defined by its difference from and opposition to ethnonationalism: “Liberal nationalism,” Lind writes, rejects “race as the basis of nationality.” And, defending his own idea of “a unique American identity,” Schlesinger explicitly separates that identity from race and appeals instead to Gunnar Myrdal’s formulation of “the Amer-

ican Creed,” to “the ideals of the essential dignity and equality of all human beings, of inalienable rights to freedom, justice, and opportunity,” ideals held “in common,” as Myrdal put it, by Americans “of all national origins, regions, creeds, and colors.”

Whatever the ultimate value of the American Creed may be, however, for the purpose of establishing “a unique American identity,” it is obviously inadequate. In turning away from race and toward “ideals,” it escapes ethnonationalism but only at the price of escaping nationalism as well. For even if we were to imagine that the ideals of the essential dignity and equality of all human beings, etc., had originated in America or were more prevalent in America, we would still not have any reason to think that there was something distinctively American about either the ideals or the belief in them. Indeed, the ideals themselves are obviously universalist; more important, the belief in them is also universalist, which is to say, the very characterization of them as ideals is universalist. To believe in these ideas is to believe that they are true for everyone and that everyone should believe them—since Russians, like Americans, *have* inalienable rights to dignity and equality, Russians, like Americans, should believe in those rights. In fact, insofar as the end of the cold war (at least as Fukuyama understands it) means that the Russians *have* come to believe in them (and the end of history means that *everyone* has come to believe in them), the distinctiveness (the Americanness) of the American Creed has disappeared. With respect to the question of American identity, the Creed can now be seen for what it really

is—an ideology, not a source of identity at all.

This is why Lind, in a book called *The Next American Nation* and subtitled *The New Nationalism and the Fourth American Revolution*, argues that “the very notion of a country based on an idea is absurd.” It’s absurd not (or, at least, not only) for psychological reasons but for logical ones: “What if two countries are founded on the same idea?” Lind asks, “Does that mean they are the same country?” Lind dismisses the view that American identity might be anchored in a set of ideas like the American Creed as “democratic universalism”; what is required, he realizes, is a conception of identity that, if it is not biological, is not ideological either. And he finds this where Schlesinger too eventually finds it. For if Schlesinger begins *The Disuniting of America* by announcing his allegiance to the ideals of the American Creed, he ends it by transforming those ideals, altering not their content but their status, their ideality. For, in the wake of “the conflict of ideologies,” the crucial thing about people, as we have already seen, is not what they believe but who they are. Thus the crucial thing about America is that it is “a transformative nation with an identity all its own”—the posthistorical struggle is to maintain this identity. The new conflict is not, in other words, between “the American Creed” (what Americans believe) and some other creed (what other people believe) but between American national identity and other identities, between what Schlesinger now calls “our own culture” and “other cultures.” Creed becomes culture; the “real American nation,” as Lind puts it, is “the cultural nation.”

The difference between one cultural nation and another, between “our own culture” and “other cultures,” will not be understood on the model of the difference between ideologies. And so the defense of American culture will not hinge on its superiority (in the way that, for instance, capitalism might be thought superior to communism) but on its suitability for those whose culture it is. “We don’t have to believe that our values are absolutely better than the next fellow’s or the next country’s,” Schlesinger says, “but we have no doubt that they are better *for us*.” Or, as Lind puts it, “One should cherish one’s nation, as one should cherish one’s family, not because it is the best in the world, but because, with all its flaws, it is one’s own.” Rather than America being valued as a place where certain beliefs are held, the beliefs Americans hold will be valued because they are American. Indeed, not only do we not have to believe that American values are really better than the next country’s, we are required to believe that they are *not* better. For if we believe that they’re better, then, as we have already begun to see, their function as a mark of our distinctiveness is jeopardized; other peoples, recognizing the superiority of our beliefs, might be convinced by them and come to share them. The idea that some values are better than others is, in other words, intrinsically universalist; the idea that those values which seem to us good are only good “*for us*,” that we “cherish” them because they are our “own,” is intrinsically identitarian. The whole point, then, of the transformation of creed into culture is to enable us to secure our identity by giving up our superiority.

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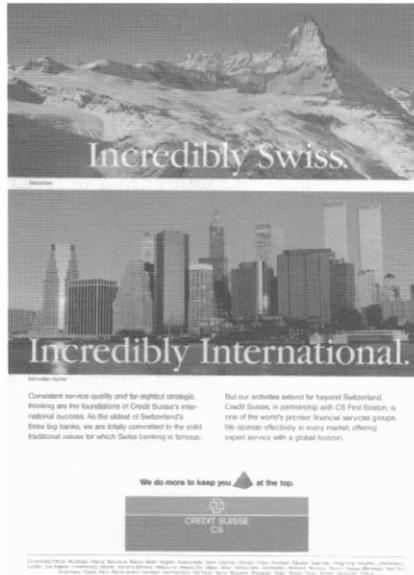
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Lind’s invocation of the family as a model for the “cultural nation,” which is to say, for the nation as an object of affection rather than admiration, is a familiar one. The nation as family has been a recurring motif in American nativism at least since Charles W. Gould’s *America, A Family Matter* (1922). But where in the twenties the invocation of the family was explicitly racist, in Lind the family is not meant to have anything to do with “blood.” It is intended only as an example of what it means to prefer some things to others without thinking that the things one prefers are in fact prefer-

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vant, it would be universalist. Which is why liberal nationalists must be committed to the view that the differences between, say, what Richard Rorty calls the “moral vocabulary” of St. Paul and the “moral vocabulary” of Freud should be understood precisely as differences in vocabulary. We shouldn’t—indeed, according to the principles of liberal nationalism, we cannot—think of St. Paul and Freud as holding competing “descriptions of the world” for then we should be moved to think of one of them as right and the other wrong. Instead we must think of them as playing what (following Wittgenstein) Rorty calls “alternative language games,” in which case saying that Freud’s beliefs are more true than St. Paul’s makes as little sense as saying that German is more true than Hebrew.

Rorty’s antifoundationalism thus provides the philosophical basis for Schlesinger’s and Lind’s cultural nationalism. Rorty wishes to replace the search for beliefs that, if they are true, are true for everyone (what he calls the commitment to “universal validity”) with the willingness to acknowledge that Freud’s beliefs are true for Freud and St. Paul’s are true for St. Paul (what he calls the “willingness to live with plurality”). And this purely epistemological critique of the universality of truth finds its necessary social expression in a commitment to the primacy of those groups whose particularity makes the critique of universality possible. If some things are true for the Hebrews and some things are true for the Austrians, then the only way to know what is true for you is to know whether you are a Hebrew or an Austrian. On the one hand, cultural nation-



alism is impossible without antifoundationalism (whether or not Lind or Schlesinger thinks of himself as an antifoundationalist); on the other hand, antifoundationalism is impossible without identitarianism (whether or not Rorty means to commit himself to the primacy of identity).

Thus, although Rorty is less interested than Schlesinger or Silko in what he apparently understands as the merely sociological question of who we today in the United States actually are, the requirement that we be somebody and that we be able to say who we are is as crucial to *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989) as it is to *The Disuniting of America* or *Almanac of the Dead*. It’s Rorty’s “irony” (we know that our beliefs, no matter how strongly we hold them, are not “universally valid”) that produces his commitment to “solidarity” (the fact that our beliefs are not “universally valid” doesn’t mean they aren’t valid for us). And, when it comes to acting on our be-

liefs, solidarity trumps irony. “We don’t have to believe that our values are absolutely better than the next fellow’s or the next country’s, but we have no doubt that they are better *for us*,” we have already heard Schlesinger say, and he goes on to add, “and are worth living by and dying for.” What Rorty calls the “fundamental premise” of his philosophy is another version of Schlesinger’s

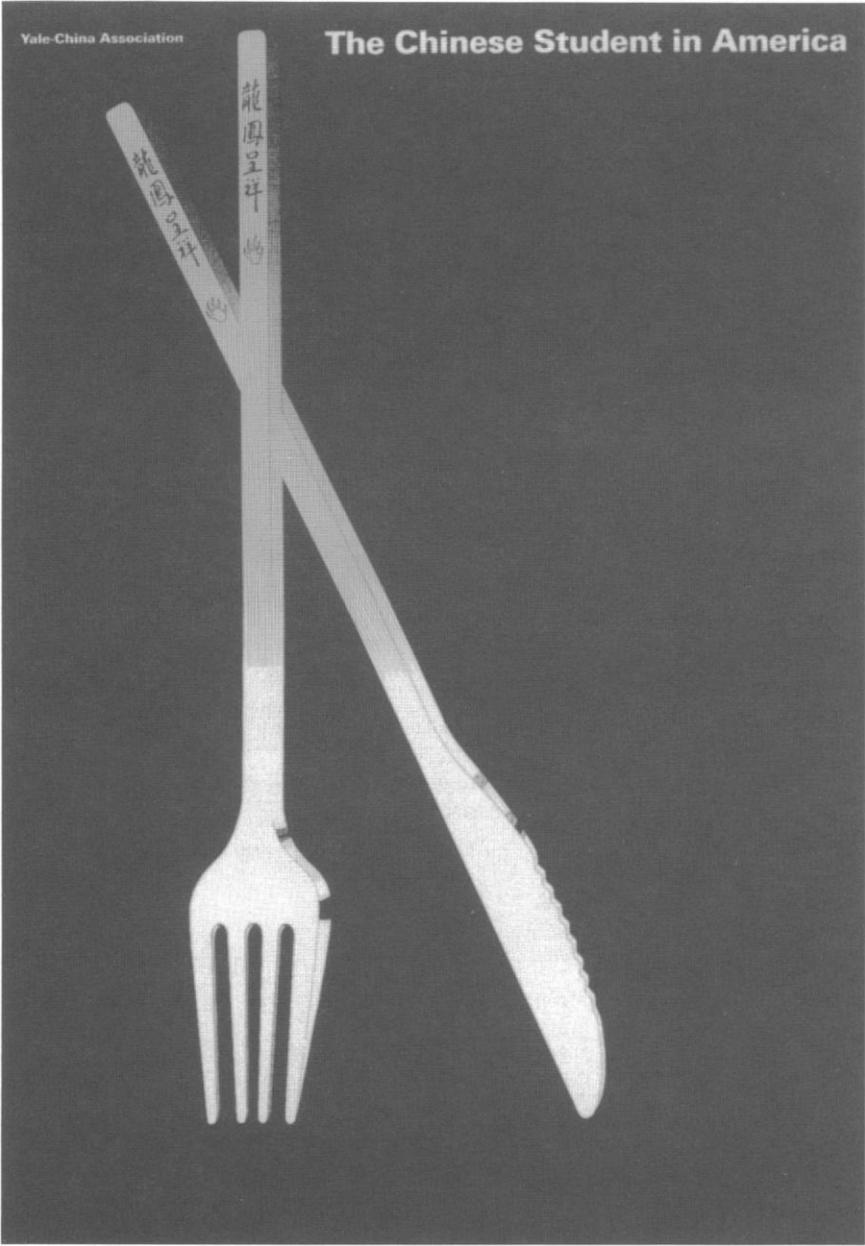
If some things are true for the Hebrews and some things are true for the Austrians, then the only way to know what is true for you is to know whether you are a Hebrew or an Austrian

call to arms: “a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought worth dying for, among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance.” So if we cannot justify our “moral vocabulary” any more than we can justify speaking Hebrew or being Austrian, we don’t need to worry because, of course, the fact that we speak Hebrew or are Austrian doesn’t need justification. Which is to say that, on Rorty’s account, it cannot make sense to die for a belief because you think it’s true; it can only make sense to die for a belief because it’s yours. Indeed, the antifoundationalist hero who is prepared first to “face up” to the contingency of his beliefs and then die for them is facing up to nothing other than the primacy of his own identity. It is insofar as he has come to believe what he believes in the same way that he has come to speak the language he speaks (through “contingent

historical circumstance”) and insofar as he can justify what he believes by only saying who he is (another “contingent historical circumstance”), that he is heroic. Contingency is identity; anti-foundationalism is identitarianism.

The fact that Rorty and Schlesinger are more willing to give their lives for their beliefs than they are to maintain their truth may seem odd, but it is actually an essential characteristic of nationalist logic. Quoting a Ukrainian writer who insists that “A nation can exist only where there are people who are prepared to die for it,” Walker Connor, the distinguished scholar of ethnonationalism, remarks that the “dichotomy between the realm of national identity and that of reason has proven vexing to students of nationalism.” But the Ukrainian’s sense that the Ukraine needs dead bodies more than it does good reasons is a consequence rather than a violation of rationality. It is only because a belief that is held in the same way that a language is spoken cannot be the sort of thing you argue for that it must be the sort of thing you die for. The virtue of the linguistic analogy is that if, on the one hand, you cannot give good reasons for speaking the language you speak, on the other hand, you don’t need to. So your inability to justify your insistence on speaking German instead of Hebrew is inevitably matched by your interlocutor’s inability to justify his insistence that you speak Hebrew instead of German. The only justifiable attitude toward different vocabularies is, as Rorty suggests, tolerance. And the only acceptable response to intolerance is, as he also suggests, force.

What justifies both the tolerance and



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the violent response to intolerance is the absence of any conflict between vocabularies; Hebrew and German do not contradict each other, and insofar as St. Paul's and Freud's moral vocabularies are like Hebrew and German, they don't contradict each other either. But if, then, the great advantage of the linguistic model of culture is that it provides difference without contradiction (as long as we don't see any conflict between our beliefs and "the other fellow's" we don't need to think of ours as being better or worse than his), its great disadvantage is that it makes contradiction inconceivable (if Paul says that Jesus is God and Freud says he isn't, they aren't disagree-

ing, they're just speaking different languages). Fukuyama imagines a world where, with the triumph of liberalism, no one any longer disagrees; Rorty, turning an event into an epistemology, imagines a world where not only have people stopped disagreeing, it has become in principle impossible to disagree. Differences in belief, understood as differences in vocabulary rather than as different "descriptions of the world," signify only differences in identity.

This obviously makes the question of who we are (which nation we belong to, which language we speak) essential, but it also makes it a very hard question to answer. Liberal nationalists like Schlesinger and Lind criticize democratic universalists for denying that the United States is a "nation-state" (democratic universalists think it is a state based on an idea), and they criticize multiculturalists for denying that it is *one* nation-state (multiculturalists think that it is a state containing many nations). But it's hard to see how the linguistic model of cultural difference that's needed to make the United States a nation instead of an idea won't make it many nations instead of one. For if all differences are understood on the model of linguistic ones and conflicts are eliminated, then the number of cultural nations becomes infinite. Lind, concerned to describe the fundamental values of the (nonracial, nonideological) American nation to which he is committed, criticizes those laws which currently permit "extreme variation in basic individual rights from state to state" and remarks that state populations "are not genuine moral communities": "There is no 'Louisiana morality,' no 'Massachusetts morality.'" But,

insofar as the residents of the state of Louisiana, by virtue of their ancestral ties to France, their Creole history, their legacy of slavery and white supremacy, etc. differ from the residents of the state of Massachusetts, with their ancestral ties to England and Ireland, their Puritan history, their legacy of abolition and white supremacy, why are these differences less worthy of respect than, say, the differences between America and France? Indeed, why aren't the cultural differences between, say, Cambridge and Roxbury also worthy of respect? What principle do we have for deciding that some differences count and others don't? What principle do we have for deciding whether the cultural nation to which we belong is the Cambridge nation, the Massachusetts nation or the American nation?

Rorty alludes to this problem when he remarks (in a footnote) that he has "no criterion of individuation for distinct languages to offer," and he seeks to solve it by suggesting that since philosophers "have used phrases like 'in the language L' for a long time without worrying too much about how one can tell where one natural language begins and another one ends," we don't really "need" such a criterion. But, of course, once language is deployed as the model of culture, we need such a criterion every time a difference arises. "Why should restrictions on abortion vary between New York and Nevada?" Lind asks. "Why should a company have to deal with entirely different rules for tax assessment in Florida and Maine?" Either we must produce the criterion—in effect, a hierarchy of difference—that will allow us to say that differences in tax law don't amount to differences in cultural na-

tionality, or we must accept the criterion already implicit in the antifoundationalist critique of universality and say that such differences do matter, that as long as difference is its own justification, all differences must be equal. Which is to say that since we currently do not have a criterion of individuation for cultures and since, were we to develop one, it's not clear that the criterion itself could be

Rorty imagines a world where not only have people stopped disagreeing, it has become in principle impossible to disagree

justified by the observation that it's our criterion (the only justification liberal or antifoundationalist nationalism allows) and still serve as a criterion, we are required to accept all differences as differences in identity, or else to return to the universalism which, as antifoundationalists and liberal nationalists, we began by repudiating.

But it's that universalism, at least in the form announced by Fukuyama, that got us into this predicament in the first place. Lind and Schlesinger reproduce the multiculturalism they attack because the triumph of the liberal idea makes ideological and economic differences irrelevant; it makes all differences cultural. And, in making differences cultural, in making them into differences between *identities*, it makes them at least tolerable and at most admirable. The end of history, then, does not require, as has sometimes been said, the absence of conflict as such; it requires only that all conflict be understood as the conflict between identities—which is to say, it requires that all conflict be understood as the ef-

fort to suppress the other and thus that no conflict be justifiable except insofar as it's understood as in defense of one's identity. The end of history *does*, however (as we have already seen), require the end of class conflict—indeed, the end of history *is* the end of class conflict. This is because classes are not, properly speaking, identities, and the logic of the relation between them cannot be understood on the logic of the relations between those “groups” (racial, national, sexual) that come to the fore in the post-historical world. The differences between these groups—in what Winant calls “radical democracy”—must be “accepted and celebrated.” But, of course, it was never a part of the argument of Marxism that *class* differences should be accepted and celebrated. Indeed, the whole point of abolishing private property was not to celebrate class difference but to eliminate it.

This is why the so-called Holy Trinity of cultural studies—race, gender, and class—is more like an uneasy, and not fully consummated, *ménage à trois*. Its point is not simply to affirm a generalized political correctness but, more spe-

Taking care of “the museum of human history” is not our replacement for art and philosophy, it is our way of doing art and philosophy

cifically, to reimagine class along the lines of race and gender, to disconnect it from its origins in economic inequality and to reinvent it as a separate but equal identity. Racial equality doesn't mean the end

of racial difference; why should class equality mean the end of class difference? Even Lind, who criticizes American multiculturalism as a distraction from the problems of the American economy, ends up dissociating class from economics. The problem with the Marxist idea of class, he writes, is that it is too completely identified “with economic function.” What Lind calls “the real class structure” of the United States goes beyond “socioeconomic” considerations.

If you are Episcopalian or Jewish, have a graduate or professional degree from an expensive university . . . watch MacNeil/Lehrer on PBS, and are saving for a vacation in London or Paris, you are a card-carrying member of the white overclass, even if your salary is not very impressive. If you are Methodist, Baptist or Catholic, have a B.A. from a state university, watch the Nashville Network on cable, and are saving for a vacation in Las Vegas . . . or Disney World, you are probably not a member of the white overclass—no matter how much money you make.

Just as racial anti-essentialists like Winant disconnect race from biology, Lind disconnects class from money, and just as Schlesinger and Rorty turn creed into culture, Lind turns class into culture.

In the famous last paragraph of his original essay, Fukuyama worried that, with the end of “ideological struggle,” the “end of history” would be “a very sad time.” “In the post-historical period,” he wrote, “there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history.” If this worry now seems misplaced, it is perhaps only partly because Fukuyama may

have been mistaken about liberal capitalism's ability to bring about the end of ideological struggle. In any event, my own belief that he *was* mistaken about the internal coherence of liberalism has not been part of my argument here. Indeed, part of what I have wanted to argue is that, whether or not he was mistaken about the end of ideological struggle, his understanding of the irrelevance of that struggle is widely shared. Everyone for whom identity is crucial—from multiculturalists like Silko and Winant to liberal nationalists like Schlesinger and Lind—is, I have suggested, a posthistoricalist, and I have also suggested that Richard Rorty—who has comparatively little interest in the question of cultural identity—is nonetheless committed to epistemological positions which make its preeminence both possible and necessary. But, whether or not Fukuyama was mistaken about the end of history, the contributions of art and philosophy to posthistoricism suggest that he was definitely mistaken about the end of art and philosophy—taking care of “the museum of human history” is not our replacement for art and philosophy, it is our way of doing art and philosophy.

And this way is not, as Fukuyama was afraid it would be, “boring.” Fukuyama thought that in a world where it was no longer necessary or even possible “to risk one’s life for a purely abstract goal,” “economic calculation” would replace the “daring” and “courage” that, before history ended, “the worldwide ideological struggle had called forth.” But the museum of history, as we have seen, has its own dangers. Silko’s Cuban Marxist is

killed for his unwillingness to listen to the chronologies of resistance and oppression that constitute Native American history. More importantly, Schlesinger and Rorty are ready to die for beliefs which have nothing to recommend them but their history, which are, as Rorty puts it, “caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance.”

The end of history does not require, as has sometimes been said, the absence of conflict as such; it requires only that all conflict be understood as the conflict between identities

Indeed, as we have already seen, it is precisely because they have nothing to recommend them but their history that it makes more sense to die for these beliefs than it does to argue for them. In post-history, we believe our beliefs not because we have reasons to think that they are true but because we have stories to tell about how they came to be ours. In posthistory, we don’t need ideologies, we have cultures; in posthistory, we don’t miss “abstract goals,” we have ourselves.