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PREFACE

Since September 11th, Americans have heatedly debated and discussed the policies of the United States, from the “war on terror” to domestic surveillance, from abortion to immigration reform, from climate change to the war in Iraq. Hundreds of thousands have participated in protest marches and have signed petitions. Some are doing so for the first time, while others have done so innumerable times. All of them, though, are part of the long American tradition of dissent.

For those who are taking up the mantle of dissent in the first decade of the twenty-first century, this concise version of *Dissent in America: The Voices That Shaped a Nation* is an indispensable reminder of the centrality of dissent in American history. The original 800-page edition of this book was published in 2006 and appealed to scholars and researchers as well as to general readers interested in American history and the long tradition of dissent that has permeated that history. The enthusiastic response to the book underscores that so many Americans, at this time of great debate about the direction of the nation, are deeply interested in learning how dissenters of the past have shaped American history.

This concise edition of *Dissent in America* is intended as an option for those who understand the importance of protest and dissent, but who are new to the historical perspective, and who want a book that is portable and easy to carry to reading circles and coffee shops, protest marches and demonstrations, and convenient enough to place next to their computer as they blog about the issues. In short, this book’s readers will use it whenever they want to share the thoughts and words of their historical predecessors to inspire their contemporaries.

For brevity’s sake, many of the longer documents of the original version have been edited down into more concise pieces while still retaining their central argument. Sometimes, where several documents were offered from a single author—for example, Marcus Garvey—only one has been reprinted here. In other cases, where there were several documents advocating a particular cause, a few that simply reiterated a single point of view have been trimmed. For example, I made the painful decision that, among the abundant voices for abolition, Sylvia Dubois and Wendell Phillips would hit the proverbial “cutting room floor.” Still, much of what they had to say is covered in other documents by such abolitionists as David Walker, Frederick Douglass, and William Lloyd Garrison. I have indicated in the introductions to the section or document where these cuts have taken place, and directed the reader to the full edition of *Dissent in America* if he or she wishes to explore a particular issue more deeply. Likewise, some of the songs in the protest music sections were cut where the song expressed a similar point of view with other songs in that section. In all, approximately fifty documents were cut from the original volume to produce this briefer book. Still, more than 130 documents representing a broad range of American dissenters remain, and they represent the broad spectrum of dissent found in the first version of the book. Readers who

enjoy this concise edition and who seek a more exhaustive analysis of dissent may want to become familiar with the original edition, which includes more selections, longer pieces, and numerous photographs.

While *Dissent in America* is intended for all readers, it is my hope that Americans who participate in protest demonstrations or marches (for whatever cause) will, in reading this book, discover and appreciate their own place in the long tradition of dissent. The voices of those who went before resonate in the documents in this book and are an enduring inspiration to those who speak out today.

Ralph F. Young
Temple University

WHAT IS DISSENT?

Cautious, careful people, always casting about to preserve their reputation and social standing, never can bring about a reform. Those who are really in earnest must be willing to be anything or nothing in the world's estimation, and publicly and privately, in season and out, avow their sympathy with despised and persecuted ideas and their advocates, and bear the consequences.

—Susan B. Anthony

All we say to America is to be true to what you said on paper. . . . Somewhere I read [pause] of the freedom of assembly. Somewhere I read [pause] of the freedom of speech. Somewhere I read [pause] of the freedom of press. Somewhere I read [pause] that the greatness of America is the right to protest for right.

—Martin Luther King Jr.

In February 2003, hundreds of thousands of Americans took to the streets of New York, Washington, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and a host of other cities around the nation to protest the planned invasion of Iraq. At the same time, other groups organized counter-demonstrations to protest against the protesters they saw as unpatriotic and disloyal. Regardless of their political views, however, both demonstrators and counter-demonstrators were exercising their fundamental right to openly express their opinions—opinions that would never have been heard without the United States' commitment, written into the Constitution, guaranteeing freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, and as Martin Luther King Jr. put it in his last speech, "the right to protest for right."

Most Americans have expressed dissent at one time or another. From grumbling about a law we feel has a negative impact upon our lives or our businesses, to voting to replace a legislator, to writing letters to the editor of a newspaper or to a member of congress, we express our disapproval of the status quo. Sometimes we sign petitions. Sometimes we become more active and join a protest march or go so far as to commit an act of civil disobedience or are even tempted to take up a brick or a stone and smash a window. However we express our dissent, we are simply part of a long American tradition of democracy.

Dissent is central to American history. Not a decade has passed without voices being raised in protest against policies and decisions made by legislators, governors, and presidents. Even before the United States was established, there was dissent. During the seventeenth century, religious dissent played a significant role in

establishing the English colonies as Puritans, Quakers, and others left behind their home country in protest of religious constraints. In the eighteenth century, political dissent in the thirteen colonies eventually led to the open rebellion that resulted in the American Revolution and the creation of the United States. In the nineteenth century, dissenters demanded the abolition of slavery, suffrage for women, and fair treatment of Native Americans, while others opposed the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War (on both sides), and the Spanish-American War. In the twentieth century, dissenters not only demanded rights for workers, women, African Americans, Chicanos, gays, and the disabled, they also protested against every war (declared and undeclared) fought by the United States, and they demanded regulations to safeguard the environment. In the twenty-first century, dissenters continue to protest against NAFTA and the Free Trade Area of the Americas, globalization and the World Bank, the Iraq War, and the Patriot Act.

Who are the dissenters? *What* is dissent? Is dissent unpatriotic or deeply patriotic? Is dissent reserved for those with moral grievances whose chief desire is to persuade the United States to live up to its ideals and to ensure that the nation is truly a land where "all men are created equal," or can dissent be used for more selfish purposes? Are both Susan B. Anthony and Timothy McVeigh equally dissenters? Does dissent ever become treason? Does dissent ultimately change society by offering new ideas, new perspectives, or does dissent merely confirm the status quo by providing a relatively harmless way of letting off steam?

Simply put, dissenters are those who go against the grain, disagreeing (rightly or wrongly) with the majority view. Historically, they were often marginalized people who lacked power and who had a legitimate grievance against the way things were. Although most American dissenters have criticized the United States from the left, dissent can come from both ends of the political spectrum. There were those who sought more equality, such as feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, workers' advocate Mother Jones, and gay rights militant Harry Hay; those who sought more moral rectitude, such as temperance campaigner Frances E. Willard, social gospel exponent Walter Rauschenbusch, and the Christian Coalition of America; and those who sought more freedom, such as abolitionist Frederick Douglass and civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer.

Some, however, were not political but social and cultural dissenters who criticized societal values and attitudes, among them reproductive rights advocate Margaret Sanger, literary artist Henry Miller, poet Allen Ginsberg, LSD guru Timothy Leary, spiritual sage Ram Dass, and Christian morality crusader Reverend Jerry Falwell. There have also been those who simply strove to gain political power through dissent as well as reactionaries who resisted change and wanted to maintain the privileges and supremacy of their class, race, or gender. For example, when abolitionists demanded the end of slavery, anti-abolitionists argued vehemently to preserve the institution. Similarly, when feminists sought suffrage and equality for women, antifeminists sought to preserve male dominance and the subjugation of women. Some dissenters who were vilified by their contemporaries are now esteemed as visionaries. Yet others, no matter how hard we try to understand their point of view, are still dismissed as crackpots.

American dissenters have achieved different levels of success, inviting various types of trouble, from angry debates to arrest to beatings and even death, as a result of their views. Despite those threats, they kept hammering away at the powers-that-be until those powers began to listen. Public opinion was swayed. Laws were made. Slavery was abolished. Unions were organized. Women got the vote. The Jim Crow laws were invalidated. And today many of those who were demonized in their time have now been consecrated by history.

Ultimately, the definition of dissent has to be somewhat fluid, because the political, social, cultural, and ideological mainstream of America has been fluid. Dissenters are not always responding to the same mainstream. Dissent against Puritanism is different from dissent against McCarthyism (despite the interesting parallels that historians have drawn between the two with respect to the theme of persecution and unfounded accusations). Anti-Puritan dissenters, such as Anne Hutchinson, were dissenting against the mainstream Puritan (religious/theological/theocratic) regimen. Anti-McCarthy spokespeople, such as Margaret Chase Smith, were dissenting against a politically intolerant mainstream. Hutchinson was protesting against the mainstream of her time, just as Senator Smith protested against the mainstream of hers and Martin Luther King Jr. fought against the racial mainstream of his. This fluid view of dissent (i.e., the expression of anti-mainstream sentiments) means that such diverse groups as the Know-Nothings, who vehemently opposed the rising tide of immigration; the Temperance crusaders and anti-abortion militants; as well as such dissimilar individuals as John Brown, who took his antislavery position so far as to kill those who would stand in his way; Emma Goldman, who was deported for her anarchist and communist views; Father Charles Coughlin, whose plausible criticism of the New Deal metamorphosed into anti-Semitic demagoguery; and Pat Robertson, who became an outspoken leader of the Christian Right, are all anti-mainstream dissenters. They all have moralistic goals even though not everyone shares the same moral values and even though very few of these dissenters would ever see eye to eye. Dissenters, therefore, can be right-wing, left-wing, or even no-wing. If they are anti-mainstream, they are dissenters. Political persuasion does not define dissent.

However we define it, dissent has been the fuel for the engine of American progress. If we keep in mind the importance and, indeed, centrality of dissent and protest in the history of the United States, we begin to have a clearer view of our nation as it continues to define itself and of how that process has affected each of us individually.

In a century that is less than a decade old, we cannot foresee the scope and extent of future protest movements, but if the history of the past four hundred years has taught us anything, it has taught us that dissent and protest in all its numerous forms will continue to shape the United States. The direction of our nation will no doubt be informed by our past, and the book you are holding represents the brave convictions of all those whose beliefs were stronger than their fears. This is their story, in their own words.

It is *your* story as well.