



The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890-1920

Jonathan M. Hansen

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During the years leading up to World War I, America experienced a crisis of civic identity. How could a country founded on liberal principles and composed of increasingly diverse cultures unite to safeguard individuals and promote social justice? In this book, Jonathan Hansen tells the story of a group of American intellectuals who believed the solution to this crisis lay in rethinking the meaning of liberalism.

Intellectuals such as William James, John Dewey, Jane Addams, Eugene V. Debs, and W. E. B. Du Bois repudiated liberalism's association with acquisitive individualism and laissez-faire economics, advocating a model of liberal citizenship whose virtues and commitments amount to what Hansen calls cosmopolitan patriotism. Rooted not in war but in dedication to social equity, cosmopolitan patriotism favored the fight against sexism, racism, and political corruption in the United States over battles against foreign foes. Its adherents held the domestic and foreign policy of the United States to its own democratic ideals and maintained that promoting democracy universally constituted the ultimate form of self-defense. Perhaps most important, the cosmopolitan patriots regarded critical engagement with one's country as the essence of patriotism, thereby justifying scrutiny of American militarism in wartime.

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