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1-Page Summary of The Soul Of America

The “Politics of Fear”

Throughout history, there have been periods where fear has prevailed. During these times, people find scapegoats and blame them for things that they themselves are responsible for. In the 2016 election of Donald Trump, Meacham believes that this happened again. When a woman died in Charlottesville while protesting against neo-Nazis, President Trump tried to shift the blame by saying she was on "many sides." He appealed to David Duke (a former KKK leader) with his rhetoric.

Meacham believes that Trump is a threat to democracy. However, he sees the general mood of bitterness and resentment as even more dangerous because it's easier for extremist ideas to take hold in such an environment. He also notes that America has been through bad times before and come out stronger than ever. In times like these, presidents play an important role in setting the tone for the rest of society by acting as role models who try to calm people down instead of amplifying their fears.

Greatness, Not Perfection

In making the case for optimism, Meacham summons the ghosts of America's past. For example, he writes about how Abraham Lincoln was initially conciliatory towards Southern slave owners but later changed his tone and became more strident in calling for freedom and equality. Lincoln also had to deal with practical matters such as ensuring that blacks were given their rights after being freed from slavery. Douglass warned against judging people too harshly based on their flaws because everyone has weaknesses.

The Civil War was a brutal conflict that ended with the defeat of the Confederacy. The South surrendered and slavery seemed to be abolished. However, this victory proved to be short-lived because Lincoln was assassinated shortly after the war ended. In addition, many white southerners feared racial equality and formed groups like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in response to these fears.

The Battle for Equality Simmers

Meacham writes that after the Civil War, Southerners tried to revise history. They said that it wasn't about...
slavery, but rather states' rights. However, in practice and law, white supremacy continued on for decades. Congress passed a 15th amendment granting black men the right to vote; however, Southern states found new ways to strip away their voting rights—the Jim Crow laws were widespread by 1890s and 1896 Supreme Court decision upheld "separate but equal."

Meanwhile, as Meacham points out, the North faced waves of immigration from Europe. Jews fled religious persecution and other groups arrived as economic refugees. President Theodore Roosevelt welcomed the concept of America being a melting pot for immigrants but he also saw it as an Anglo-Saxon endeavor and had little patience for self-examination when it came to Native American genocide that accompanied westward expansion.

Despite the fact that President Roosevelt promoted racial equality, he was still troubled by the prospect of "race suicide." He did not want to promote policies that would decrease the white population. However, he felt it was important to be fair and treat everyone equally. In one speech (made in 1912 after being wounded by a shot fired by a deranged man), Roosevelt told the story of promoting five soldiers for bravery in battle. He later learned two were Protestants, two were Catholic and one was Jewish. But, Roosevelt told his audience, they received accolades based on performance without regard to religion. If there had been more than five Jews or Catholics or Protestants who deserved promotions then he would have gladly given them those promotions as well.

While Roosevelt had contradictory views on race, the United States in general was conflicted about social progress. Women won the right to vote in 1920, but segregation remained and the Ku Klux Klan gained momentum. The movie The Birth of a Nation (a baldly racist paean to white supremacy) inspired some men to resurrect the KKK, which was active across all states by 1924. The group vilified not just blacks but also Jews and Catholics. The KKK is an example of politics based on fear that offers a comforting identity for whites who are anxious about social change.

Warren Harding, president of the United States at that time, was able to influence the people by speaking out against the Klan. He told them that their beliefs were not compatible with American democracy and spoke about racial equality. His audience did not agree with him because they thought it would lead to black people being elected as president in future. Harding also supported laws banning lynching which was a progressive position during his presidency. The popularity of the KKK slowly faded away when immigration decreased due to new laws and one of its leaders was found guilty for kidnapping, rape and murder.

**Calling Out Fear Itself**

Meacham now moves on to the Great Depression, which was a difficult time in American history. People were concerned that America would become like Germany or Russia and have communism or fascism. Many people doubted that Franklin Roosevelt could restore order because there had been an assassination attempt against him. There was even a wealthy group of Wall Street tycoons who tried to stage a coup against Roosevelt so they could impose fascism on America.

Roosevelt didn't pander to the fearful tone of the times. He called out fear in his first inauguration speech and was relentlessly hopeful, even though he faced constant criticism for his policies. The Depression also brought out an isolationist streak in American politics that advocated staying out of World War II.
Some people who supported this movement were aviator Charles Lindbergh and Henry Ford, but they had anti-Semitic views that undermined their arguments.

Roosevelt wasn't perfect. He made some mistakes, like the internment of Japanese Americans and not doing enough to help Jews escape Hitler's regime. However, he did raise the number of refugees from Germany and Austria who were allowed into the United States during his presidency.

Roosevelt had a change of heart on helping Jewish refugees when deciding whether or not to run for a third term as president in 1938.

The Fight for Civil Rights

Throughout American history, Meacham argues that champions of change have been complicated men. Lincoln moved from tolerating slavery to targeting it. Theodore Roosevelt spoke flippantly about the savage races even as he pursued equality. And Lyndon B Johnson transformed from a Southerner who tolerated discrimination into the president who signed sweeping civil rights reform. He himself recounts how his role changed after John F Kennedy's assassination: "If I got out too far ahead of my voters they'd have sent me right back to Johnson City where I couldn't have done anything for anybody, white or black." Now he represents everyone and can do what everyone thinks is right." His actions were motivated by fairness and equality rather than hate.

A century after the Civil War, racial equality in the South remained a charged topic. People who disagreed with integration used signs that said "Keep Our Schools White." Protesters who despised integration waved placards reading "Texas Traitor." Robert Penn Warren argued that the legacy of the Civil War gave Southerners an excuse for every transgression against decency. Northerners also tapped into this same legacy for moral redemption long after it had run dry.

Johnson, for his part, decided to make civil rights legislation his legacy. He got the bill through committee and onto the floor of Congress. After that, he badgered reluctant senators into supporting it by cutting off their complaints and reminding them of the historical significance of such a law. Johnson also made sure there was bipartisan support, or else he threatened mutiny in America. When Johnson ultimately signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he acknowledged that this would cost him politically as Southern states would now be voting Republican for many years to come.

Breaking Out of the Cycle

Meacham doesn't just analyze history. He also offers suggestions on how to improve our democracy, which he sees as broken. His four recommendations are:

- **Engage** – Americans have a healthy skepticism, but it shouldn't turn into cynicism or apathy. Paying attention, expressing opinions and voting are obligations in democracy. *Resist tribalism* – Too many people don't listen to other ideas or analyze them critically. Democracy thrives when we debate conflicting ideas freely.

- **Respect facts** – In tribal times, people reject information that doesn’t conform to their positions.
Democracy requires its participants to give a fair hearing to opposing points of view instead of reflexively rejecting them.

- To give the president more sympathy - many people are too quick to either hate or love a president. They should try to understand that presidents are human and cut them some slack. President Kennedy said, "No one has a right to grade a president…who has not sat in his chair, examined the mail and information that came across his desk, and learned why he made his decisions."

Speaking of presidents, Meacham doesn't spend a lot of time on Donald Trump. However, he does make it clear that Trump's style isn't his cup of tea. In fact, the reason this book was written is because Trump embraced white nationalists and inspired him to write about chaotic times in history. Compared to the Civil War and Great Depression, things around 2016 seem pretty tame.

**Full Summary of The Soul Of America**

**Overall Summary**

The Soul of America is a book about the history of racial justice and anti-immigrant nativism in the United States. It explores how those two forces have battled against each other throughout American history, with many examples from the Reconstruction era, the civil rights movement of the mid-20th century, and even today.

The author of this book is disturbed by the fact that President Trump did not condemn white supremacists when he addressed the murder of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville, Virginia. Meacham wants to show how other eras were similar and also remind people that America has survived such events before.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter discusses the roots of presidential power, which are rooted in the Founding Fathers' faith in George Washington and their belief that he was a symbol of unity for America. Andrew Jackson's presidency marked the beginning of an era when presidents were more powerful than before because they viewed themselves as central to American governance instead of just being figureheads. After Jackson, Abraham Lincoln reemphasized that idea during his presidency by leading America through its Civil War and preserving the Union while abolishing slavery.

The second chapter discusses the period after the Civil War. Although the South lost, it spread a false narrative that slavery wasn't really why they seceded from the Union. This allowed them to maintain their dignity in defeat and build an infrastructure for white supremacy. Andrew Johnson was chosen by Southerners as their champion because he opposed Reconstruction policies and helped pass laws protecting black citizens' rights. Congress managed to override his vetoes with key legislation, but later impeached him when he disobeyed a law he had signed into effect.

A few years later, former Union General Ulysses S. Grant became president. He was in charge of a divided country and he pushed for Reconstruction policies which helped African-Americans vote and pursue other rights. However, his efforts were cut short by the compromise of 1877 which ended Reconstruction prematurely, leading to segregation and a new era of anti-black terrorism that lasted
decades.

In chapter three, the author explores Theodore Roosevelt's presidency. He was a progressive president who made great strides in regulating banks and industry. However, his greatest legacy is that he accepted immigrants into the country and even invited an African American to dinner at the White House. While this seems like progress for our time, Meacham points out that Roosevelt also had racist tendencies when it came to imperialism in Asia.

The fourth chapter discusses the turmoil of the 1910s and early 1920s. This was an era where anti-immigrant sentiment reached its peak, thanks to a white supremacist film called Birth of a Nation. It was also an era when people were afraid of communists and anarchists because they saw what happened in Russia with the Bolshevik Revolution. The ratification of the 19th Amendment gave women voting rights while President Woodrow Wilson resegregated federal offices at the same time.

In the fifth chapter, Meacham explores how President Franklin D. Roosevelt guided America out of the Great Depression in the 1930s. He also talks about how FDR led a country that was generally isolationist into World War II against Germany and Japan. According to Meacham, American democracy hung in the balance during this time because many feared it would devolve into totalitarianism whether in right-wing fascism or left-wing communism.

In this chapter, Meacham discusses Joseph McCarthy. He manipulated the new media of television to spread fear and hate in America. In his speeches, he made many false accusations about people being communist sympathizers without any evidence. Journalists were forced to rethink their approach when covering public figures who consistently lied.

In the seventh chapter, Meacham tells about the efforts of President Lyndon B. Johnson and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to pass civil rights legislation in spite of a deadly quagmire in Vietnam that LBJ had to oversee at the time.

Finally, Meacham reiterates his belief that President Trump has failed to appeal to America's better angels. He ends the book with a list of five civic duties every American should follow to help win the battle between hope and fear in America.

**Introduction: “To Hope Rather Than to Fear”**

In this book, Meacham aims to discuss the past American politics of hope and compare it with today's politics. He hopes that by doing so, he can help Americans embrace their better qualities again in order to prevail over fear and madness.

The president is the most powerful person in America and sets the tone for the entire country. Therefore, it's important to have a good understanding of how that person affects our nation. In this book, Meacham writes about presidents who he believes set a great example by using their power wisely during times of conflict or division. He also discusses other leaders who were not elected but had an impact on our society nonetheless.
Meacham then explains what he means by the "soul" of America. These descriptions may seem overly sentimental or vague, but they are real nevertheless. The American soul encompasses both empathy and equality, as well as vicious white supremacist groups like the KKK.

The American people have two opposing sides to their character. These two sides are often in conflict with each other, and they change over time. It is difficult for the people of America to come together because of this. However, it is possible for them to agree on some things if the leader of America says or does something that makes the citizens hopeful about the future.

The author then lays out a pattern of ebb and flow in America. Following the Civil War, there was progress for newly freed black Americans through constitutional amendments. However, the South devolved into a state of apartheid under Jim Crow laws that would last nearly a century. In the 1870s President Ulysses S. Grant took steps to effectively quash the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), but it reemerged in the 1910s amid anti-immigrant sentiment. For much of the 1930s, Nazi sympathizers held enormous sway over US politics until Pearl Harbor forced us to join World War II against fascism. And decades of segregation and apartheid finally came to an end—at least from a legal standpoint—in American South thanks to court decisions and Martin Luther King Jr.'s activism working with Lyndon B Johnson's policy work. Yet as illustrated by Unite The Right rally among countless other 21st century displays of bigotry, this fight is far from over.

Despite the ebbs and flows of history, America has trended toward progress. However, politics can be a major factor in this process. Despite that fact, Meacham believes that we're still moving forward as a nation. He also admits to having an irrational faith in American exceptionalism; however, he argues that it's necessary for people to commit acts of citizenship whenever our country is tested by periods of intense bigotry and divisiveness.

**Chapter 1: “The Confidence of the Whole People: Visions of the Presidency, the Ideas of Progress and Prosperity, and ‘We, the People’”**

In the beginning of this article, it talks about how even in the early days of America there was a debate over what should and shouldn't be possible for a president to do. The founders knew that presidents couldn’t have absolute power like kings did, but they weren’t sure exactly where to draw the line. They had faith that George Washington would make good decisions because he was an honorable man who everyone respected, but they didn’t know if later leaders would continue to uphold those values. Even though some people might think we don’t need limits on our presidency anymore, Meacham argues that we still need them because Trump is doing things no one has ever done before—like firing FBI directors and attacking his own Attorney General on Twitter.

The Founding Fathers had a lot of faith in the American people. They believed that they could govern themselves and set up their own government, which has evolved over time to become what we have today. Andrew Jackson's presidency is an example of this evolution, as he helped shape the role of President by making it clear that he was speaking for all Americans. The author states that while this may seem obvious to us now, it wasn't always so back then; in fact, some even disagreed with his idea at first because there were many who didn't think America was ready for such a thing yet. In addition to setting the precedent for future presidents' actions (regardless of party), Jackson also showed how powerful one
A person can be when standing up against oppression.

The anti-Jacksonian Whig Party was in power, and few presidents used their executive powers as dramatically as Andrew Jackson. Abraham Lincoln changed that when he took office during a time of civil war. He had to negotiate his own character with the character of the country he governed. Frederick Douglass said at the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial:

According to Meacham, Lincoln's views on race and slavery were constantly evolving. His goal was to preserve the United States as an undivided whole. He thought that this could be achieved by preserving the Declaration of Independence and expanding its pursuit of happiness for all. This is a concept rooted in Protestantism, expanded upon during the Enlightenment, and supported by market economics. For that reason, Wilson's efforts to expand women rights are part of this national interest because it expands equal opportunity for people who have been denied such opportunities before. The same goes with Johnson's initiative to promote civil rights for African Americans—it too was part of the national interest because it increased economic opportunity for those previously excluded from it due to their skin color or ancestry. Finally, Meacham states that when one agrees with what a president believes in terms of equality (and his character), then he/she must use persuasion as well as compromise skills at negotiation so they can achieve these goals without causing any harm or damage along the way.

Chapter 2: “The Long Shadow of Appomattox: The Lost Cause, the Ku Klux Klan, and Reconstruction”

The author believes that the Civil War and its aftermath are still with us today. The South lost the war, but it won the peace through propaganda efforts. In this case, they argued that states' rights rather than slavery was responsible for causing secession from the Union. This effort to rewrite history led to a century-long struggle between white people in America over issues of race and power.

In examining the Lost Cause narrative, Meacham first disproves its claim that slavery was incidental to the Civil War. He cites many instances of Southern politicians and elites stating that preserving slavery was key in their decision to secede from the Union. Also crucial to the Lost Cause narrative is Lee's reputation as a virtuous gentleman who fought not for slavery but his countrymen. Moreover, Lee's questionable deification allowed Southerners to believe they lost because of lack of manpower and industrial strength rather than military prowess.

In addition to political rhetoric, the South also used paramilitary forces like the Ku Klux Klan to preserve white supremacy. The KKK was founded in Pulaski, Tennessee in 1866 and targeted black Americans who tried to vote or run for office. According to Meacham, no group did more damage during Reconstruction than the KKK.

At the federal level, Radical Republicans were not able to convince President Andrew Johnson to support their efforts for freed black Americans in the Old Confederacy. They wanted him to punish white Southerners for seceding from the Union and starting a civil war, but instead he ignored them and sided with his Southern constituency who didn't want any changes that would benefit or protect blacks. He vetoed several bills that favored black people, including one that protected their rights.
As Johnson continued to lose ground on Reconstruction, he became more divisive than ever. He would play up a sense of his own victimhood and that of the South in general. Eventually, Johnson was impeached by Congress, though he avoided removal by one vote.

In 1868, Ulysses S. Grant won the presidency of the United States. Unlike Johnson, Grant appreciated that there was a lot riding on his role as president. He also had to deal with racial issues and a fractured nation due to Johnson's divisive rhetoric. In order to achieve reconciliation between North and South while still protecting black rights, he supported several critical measures, including new amendments like the 15th Amendment which bans discrimination at ballot boxes based on race and laws like the Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871 which allowed for crackdowns on groups like the Ku Klux Klan. This all but eliminated them until their resurgence in early 20th century America.

In 1876, Rutherford B. Hayes became president by making a deal with Southern Democrats to end Reconstruction in exchange for their votes. The presidents from then on are described as weak and unmemorable because they didn't continue the commitment of individuals like Ulysses S. Grant and Radical Republicans. White Southerners were able to restore the Old Confederacy as a bastion of white supremacy, ushering in an era of "American apartheid".

Chapter 3: “With Soul of Flame and Temper of Steel: ‘The Melting Pot,’ TR and His ‘Bully Pulpit,’ and the Progressive Promise”

Unlike many presidents before and after, President Theodore Roosevelt embraced immigrants to the United States. He supported their efforts to become Americans and saw them as essential for American progress. This view is reflected in Israel Zangwill’s 1908 play The Melting Pot.

Meacham provides a brief history of anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States. He traces it back to the Alien and Sedition Acts, which gave extraordinary power to the federal government to expel noncitizens from America, signed by President John Adams in 1798. Anti-immigrant sentiment was not prevalent until 1848 when there was another wave of European immigrants after revolutions across Europe. The Know Nothings were formed as a result of this surge and became popular for some time before fading away. In 1882, Chester A. Arthur signed an act that excluded Chinese workers from entering America due to racist labor anxieties directed toward Asian immigrants at the time.

Roosevelt’s views on poverty and immigration were shaped by his time as New York City's police commissioner from 1894 to 1897. He was profoundly affected by How the Other Half Lives, Jacob Riis’s expose of poverty in 1890, which he walked the streets with at night to ensure that his officers were doing their jobs. Meacham writes, “Roosevelt adopted progressive reforms out of revulsion for the excesses of industrialization in America”.

Though Roosevelt was not a nativist, he still held racist beliefs. He preferred people of Anglo-Saxon origin and believed that it was the white man's burden to spread Western values in foreign countries where the inhabitants were not white. At the same time, he extended an invitation to Booker T. Washington for dinner at the White House, which is significant because no black American had been invited before. In addition, many black candidates and appointees received support from Roosevelt during his presidency. From this mixed record, historian Jon Meacham concludes that Roosevelt sided more with
America's better angels than its worst ones.

Finally, Meacham points out that Jane Addams was a major influence on Roosevelt's political views. For example, by the end of his career he supported women's suffrage which is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: “A New and Good Thing in the World: The Triumph of Women’s Suffrage, the Red Scare, and a New Klan”

Meacham details the history of women's suffrage, beginning with Abigail Adams's plea to her husband John in 1776 that he "remember the ladies". The movement gained momentum when Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organized the Seneca Falls Convention. Susan B. Anthony was arrested for voting illegally in 1872, a civil disobedience movement began led by Quaker activist Alice Paul starting in 1917, and Wilson announced his support for allowing women to vote after being jailed himself during one protest.

Despite the hard-fought progress achieved by women's rights activists in the 1910s, Meacham is ambivalent about the era. He writes that while there were some positive changes during this time, it was also a period of segregation and racism. For example, he says that black people voted for Wilson because they wanted to get rid of Taft as president since he wasn't interested in racial equality. Unfortunately, their gamble backfired when Wilson supported Jim Crow laws instead. Furthermore, lynching continued without any real efforts to stop them from happening until later on during his presidency. Finally, despite making an appeal against lynching in 1918, Wilson actually espoused rhetoric inspired by Lost Cause narratives at Gettysburg's 50th anniversary celebration.

Wilson's presidency also coincided with the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan. Meacham attributes this resurgence to a film called The Birth of a Nation, which glorified members of the first Ku Klux Klan along with their heroic actions during Reconstruction. By 1924, every state in the country had a Klan presence and it had tremendous political power.

Meacham also attributes the growth of the second Ku Klux Klan to a number of factors, including America's involvement in World War I and an influx of immigrants. He cites Russia's Bolshevik Revolution as another contributing factor because it created fear among many Americans that communism would spread throughout the country. In addition, he says people were uneasy about crime in general during this time period, which led to calls for action from Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. The result was a series of raids that resulted in thousands being arrested and hundreds being deported due to Palmer's actions; however, many more would have been deported if it wasn't for intervention by labor officials who disagreed with his methods.

The KKK and the Red Scare lost their influence in the 1920s. There were a number of reasons for this; one reason was that courts exposed them, journalists investigated them, Presidents Harding and Coolidge tried to stop them from spreading violence, immigration declined because quotas were imposed on immigrants (immigration had peaked in 1921), economic prosperity decreased anxieties about crime and job loss which both groups exploited, but most importantly the Klan itself sabotaged itself with scandals such as Stephenson's rape/murder of a young white woman.
Chapter 5: “The Crisis of the Old Order: The Great Depression, Huey Long, the New Deal, and America First”

At the beginning of the Great Depression, America's fate as a democracy was in danger. Meacham writes, "Would the nation save itself or take a similar path to Italy and Germany? Would it become more like Communism?"

In the early 1900's, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt saw two of America's most powerful people as Senator Huey Long and General Douglas MacArthur. He was afraid that Long would lead a coup from the left and MacArthur might do it from the right. This shows how many Americans were willing to accept a dictator in 1933 when FDR said that he'd expand his powers to fight against the Great Depression. Meacham also talks about Smedley Butler who was awarded two Medals of Honor by leading an attempted military takeover on Wall Street during The Great Depression.

Meanwhile, Long voiced the concerns of the poor and middle class. He was also very critical of Roosevelt's New Deal program. Coughlin was another critic who advocated isolationism and nonintervention in regards to Nazi Germany.

Roosevelt was in a difficult position. He had to balance between the extremes of fascism and communism, which were very popular at that time. However, he didn't want to lose the opportunity to fight for his own ideas: The New Deal. In order not to be like Hitler or Stalin, Roosevelt mostly avoided using fear-mongering tactics during his campaign speeches. But once he became president, Roosevelt did go too far when he tried to change some laws so they’d better fit his agenda; however, after realizing how much power he had gained by being elected twice as President of the United States of America and allying himself with other countries in World War II against Japan and Germany (the Axis Powers), FDR changed course and became more cautious about making changes without considering their consequences first because this would have been dangerous for democracy around the world if it were successful elsewhere.

Roosevelt was faced with an even more difficult task than Lincoln, because he had to convince the country that it needed to enter World War II. At first, most Americans opposed going into war in Europe. In fact, they were so strongly against it that a poll found 95% of them were opposed to entering the war. However, support grew after Germany invaded Poland and then moved on other countries in Europe. Nevertheless, there remained strong anti-war sentiment among many people who feared what would happen if America became involved in another European conflict. Their fears led them to oppose American involvement in the war and form groups like "America First," which rallied around Charles Lindbergh as their spokesperson and leader of this movement against U.S involvement in World War II.

Many of Roosevelt's points would have been rendered moot by the bombing in Pearl Harbor, which was followed by the declaration of war from Adolf Hitler. The United States entered World War II and it became Roosevelt's turn to give into politics of fear. He authorized the internment of 117,000 Japanese Americans between 1942 and 1946 which is seen as one of the greatest national shames in 20th century history. Meacham also ponders whether or not Roosevelt could have done more to help European Jews prior to entering World War II.
Chapter 6: “Have You No Sense of Decency? ‘Making Everyone Middle Class,’ the GI Bill, McCarthyism, and Modern Media”

Meacham examines the growth of the American middle class from 1945 to 1960, or more specifically, how it started in the 1940s under President Harry S. Truman and expanded further under Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1950s. He attributes this growth to many factors such as unprecedented defense spending during World War II, The GI Bill which granted veterans college tuition and guaranteed home loans, earlier legislation like The Morrill Act of 1862 which created land-grant universities, and Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive legislation against monopolies and other unfair industrial practices at the turn of the century. In a sense he views postwar prosperity as a reward for all that had been accomplished by activists before him in his book up until that point.

Eisenhower did not dismantle the New Deal. He continued to invest in public projects like the Interstate Highway System and Social Security, despite his conservative wariness of too much central government.

Despite this, Eisenhower's moderate policies created several powerful enemies. One of the most important was Robert Welch, a businessman and right-wing political organizer who blamed Republican losses in Congress on Eisenhower. He went on to create a group called the John Birch Society that claimed that Eisenhower and his cabinet members were communist sympathizers despite their pasts as war heroes.

Meanwhile, Welch's anti-communist hysteria combined with a preternaturally savvy use of the latest media platforms in the person of Senator Joseph McCarthy. By utilizing television and press conferences, McCarthy whipped up anti-communist fervor while remaining at the center of virtually every media narrative. According to Cohn, "Joe McCarthy bought Communism in much the same way as other people purchase a new automobile."

Truman was against McCarthy and his actions. He spoke out vociferously against him, but Eisenhower preferred to ignore him to avoid giving the senator free publicity. Truman also removed a criticism of McCarthy from a speech he was about to deliver because he didn't want to give the senator any more attention than necessary. Kennedy also chose not to criticize McCarthy publicly due to fear that it would hurt his chances in an election in Massachusetts at that time.

Eventually, McCarthy's tactics became too much for the public to handle. The turning point came when a lawyer named Joseph N. Welch responded to McCarthy's relentless attacks on a young colleague by asking "Have you no sense of decency?" Eventually, he was censured and died at age 48.

Chapter 7: “What the Hell Is the Presidency For? ‘Segregation Forever,’ King’s Crusade, and LBJ in the Crucible”

Chapter 7 opens with the night of November 22, 1963. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated that day and his vice president Lyndon B. Johnson took over as president. He made it a priority to pass civil rights legislation that JFK had been championing for months before he died. In January, George Wallace became governor of Alabama and said in his inauguration speech that he would stand up against federal
efforts to enforce desegregation laws because segregation was good for America. Six months later in June, Wallace tried to block the University of Alabama from integrating by standing in front of its doors. However, this effort failed when two black students were allowed entrance anyway. Then Medgar Evers, who fought for racial justice, was assassinated on June 12th after having previously survived a shooting attack himself earlier that year. The next month Martin Luther King Jr gave an inspiring speech called "I Have a Dream" during the March on Washington which brought together leaders from different races and religions to fight for equality. Then four young girls were killed in a church bombing perpetrated by members of the Ku Klux Klan; they wanted people to stay segregated so they bombed churches where blacks worshipped because they thought it would make them angry enough to retaliate violently against whites.

Although passing civil rights legislation was important, Johnson also knew that it would be difficult to accomplish. He told his advisors "What is the point of being president if I can't get this done?"

Johnson was known for being a segregationist congressman. However, he eventually embraced his destiny as a civil rights reformer. In fact, according to the author, Johnson's experience with segregationists made him better suited than Kennedy to convince Southern Democrats to vote in favor of civil rights legislation. As early as the night of Kennedy’s funeral, Johnson tracked down King and emphasized that he would do everything in his power to move the bill out of committee by Christmas that year.

It took a bit longer than expected, but Johnson was able to get the Civil Rights Act through the Rules Committee by January 1964. By February, it passed in the House. The next step was getting 67 votes in the Senate to break a filibuster led by Southern Dixiecrats like Strom Thurmond. After that, he had enough support and passed it on June 19th of 1964.

After winning the 1964 election, Johnson asked his attorney general to write a voting rights act that would be as tough as possible. The president wanted it done quickly before he lost political power after losing the election.

After Johnson moved to Washington, King continued his non-violent protests. In 1965, he and other activists were attacked by police officers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. It was a violent encounter that left some of them injured. However, Johnson didn't send National Guard troops because he feared it would cause more problems than it solved. Instead, he convinced George Wallace not to use violence against protesters by inviting him to the White House for a meeting with civil rights leaders and influential black citizens from across the country.

A few months later, Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The narrative then jumps ahead to March 31, 1968. In a televised address to the nation, Johnson announced he would not seek reelection. The year had begun poorly with the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, which emboldened North Vietnamese troops against half-a-million American soldiers stationed there. Within a week of Johnson's announcement, Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated. Two months later presidential candidate Robert F Kennedy was also assassinated and widespread social unrest erupted in cities around the country at the chaotic Democratic National Convention that August. These events paved way for Nixon’s win over Hubert Humphrey in November who escalated war efforts during his
presidency by increasing troop levels from 525 thousand to almost one million by December 1969 as well as bombing campaigns across Cambodia and Laos that killed hundreds of thousands more civilians than US forces lost during all of World War II (16 million). By late 1968 16,899 Americans had died in Vietnam at an average rate of 48 per day since 1965 when it started under President Lyndon B Johnson. Finally Meacham argues that Nixon’s ascendency was aided by a new kind cultural populism pioneered by consultant Roger Ailes who went on to found Fox News, which has dominated cable news ratings ever since.

**Conclusion: “The First Duty of an American Citizen”**

Meacham takes a long view of the arc of history and argues that while the 21st century is imperfect, it's freer than ever before. He says that President Donald Trump has abandoned the country’s better angels and embraced fear mongering more than any other president in recent memory. Meacham cites how each of the previous six US presidents continually rose to occasion to speak to what’s best in America as evidence for this claim.

On that note, the author identifies five duties that every American should uphold. The first is to engage politically by at least paying attention and voting. The second duty is to avoid tribalism by viewing politics as a "mediation of difference" rather than an all-out war. The third duty is to deploy facts and reason. Truman said, “The dictators of the world say that if you tell a lie often enough, why people will believe it. Well if you tell the truth often enough they’ll believe it too”. The fourth duty is to find balance so each party can be right sometimes. And finally, we must keep history in mind so we don't repeat what happened with McCarthyism (a demagogue who was president).

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