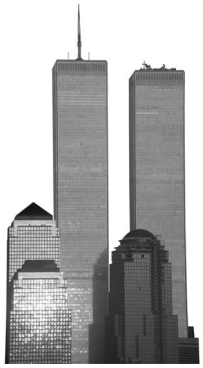
WILL KYMLICKA: A CONVERSATION CANADIANS WERE GOING TO HAVE ANYWAY



Will Kymlicka is a Queen's National Scholar in the Department of Philosophy at Queen's University. The author of five books, he won both the C. B. Macpherson Prize from the Canadian Political Science Association in 1995 and the Ralph J. Bunche Award from the American Political Science Association in 1996 for his book Multicultural Citizenship. *He has had research fellowships at Princeton, Toronto, Ottawa, Carleton, the European University Institute and the Central European University in Budapest, where he is a "recurrent visiting professor in the Nationalism Studies program." He talked with William Watson on Oct. 16.*

Will Kymlicka est National Scholar au Département de philosophie de Queen's University. Il a publié cinq ouvrages dont Multicultural Citizenship, prix C. B. Macpherson de l'Association canadienne des sciences politiques (1995) et prix Ralph J. Bunche de l'American Political Science Association (1996). Il a détenu des titres de recherche aux universités de Toronto, d'Ottawa et de Carleton, au European University Institute et à la Central European University à Budapest, où il est régulièrement invité comme professeur au programme d'études sur le nationalisme. William Watson s'est entretenu avec lui le 16 octobre.

William Watson: Where were you on Sept. 11, what was your reaction, and when do you think you began analyzing it all as a philosopher?

Will Kymlicka: I was teaching that morning, Tuesday morning. It was a three-hour class, so the attacks happened while we were in class. I didn't hear about it till I got out around noon. And so already the Trade Center buildings had collapsed. Right away, people were assuming it was Muslim terrorists, and quite quickly people were asking me about what I thought the impact would be on tolerance in Canada and whether there would be a backlash against multiculturalism and Muslims in Canada.

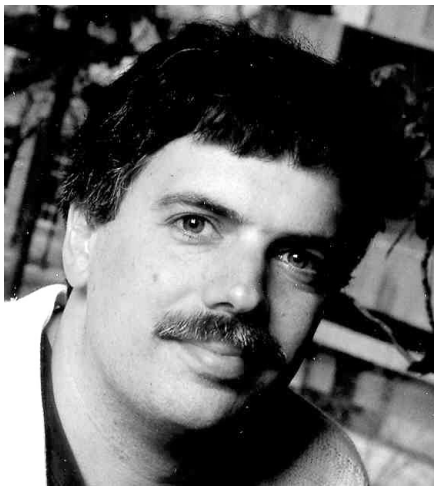
I had one or two requests to do interviews about that right afterwards, and I chose not to. I don't know if you remember the way the debate developed in the first few days. It was a strangely polarized debate. On the one hand, those who said that there might be some root causes for this terrorism were accused of being anti-American and blaming the victim. On the other hand, people who said that this required a forceful response were accused of being bloodthirsty. It seemed that no matter what you said, you were going to be accused of either being anti-American or being bloodthirsty.

If I had known for sure that I would be given enough time or space in which to make clear that I was avoiding these two extremes, I would have done the interviews. But if you're just getting a five-second clip, or ten-word quote, then it's impossible to avoid appearing one-sided. So I quite deliberately chose to stay out of the debate for that first couple of weeks.

William Watson: What are your thoughts now?

Will Kymlicka: I'm not a security expert or an expert on Afghanistan and the Middle East, so my main interest is on the impact on Canadian society and in particular on our attitudes about cultural diversity and tolerance. Already, even before Sept. 11, there was an issue about the status of Muslims in Canada. We know from public opinion polls that native-born Canadians were more nervous about the ability of Muslims to integrate into our society and our political system than other immigrant groups.

For example, Canadians have higher comfort levels with East Asians than with Arabs or South Asians. Even before Sept. 11, Canadians appeared to be more comfortable with having Chinese, Vietnamese or Japanese



Will Kymlicka

neighbors and co-workers than with neighbours or co-workers who were Muslim, or South Asian (i.e., Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi), or Arab. So I think that was already a source of tension for many Canadians. And it really was a psychological conflict for many people, since the idea that Canadians are a tolerant and welcoming people is central to Canada's self-identity. I believe that this "multicultural" self-identity actually goes quite deep in Canada, and is now a constitutive part of our identity as a country, even among those who don't particularly like the federal policy of official multiculturalism. The idea of Canada as an open and tolerant country has set in quite deep in our idea of what it is to be a Canadian. People want to be open and inclusive, but they had this nagging anxiety about Muslims, and had difficulty reconciling these two things.

William Watson: What do you think its sources are?

Will Kymlicka: We don't know. The people who do these studies of people's "comfort levels" with different groups rarely press on to figure out what exactly underlies it. My hypothesis, and this is absolute speculation, is that it's more of a religious thing than a racial thing. I don't think white Canadians view Arabs and South Asians as racially inferior to East Asians. I think it is more of a religious thing. Many Canadians have this nagging worry that Muslims, and also Hindus and Sikhs, are more prone to a certain kind of religious extremism than East Asians. East Asians are not viewed as religious fundamentalists. Whatever else we think about East Asian cultures and societies, they are not known for their religious fundamentalism. By contrast, we get a fairly regular diet of news stories, and this goes back decades, of religiously inspired radicalism and violence on the part of Hindus and Sikhs and Muslims—groups which most Canadians tend to lump together.

William Watson: There were a couple of incidents where Sikhs ran afoul of people's anger shortly after Sept. 11.

Will Kymlicka: Where Sikhs were attacked as Muslims. Yes. And so I think that Sept. 11 is now, as it were, jump-starting a debate that we were going to have to have anyway. This was a nagging anxiety many native-born Canadians had, but weren't talking about openly because we're a polite country and don't like to talk about these kinds of anxieties. Also many Canadians are worried about being accused of being racist or intolerant if they ask these questions. But in the back of their minds many people were asking themselves: how easy is it going to be for these particular religious groups to fit in? And now, after Sept. 11, it has gone from the back of people's minds to the front.

My optimistic view is that the outcome of this, in the end, will be good for Canada. It's going to be a very unpleasant process over the next while for Muslims, and also probably Hindus and Sikhs, but at the end of the day, it may actually result in a more secure status for Muslims in Canada. Because over the course of the debate most Canadians are going to learn a lot more about the nature of Islam, and, more specifically, they're going to learn about the subdivisions within Islam.

Imagine there's a Muslim family from Senegal down the street. Prior to Sept. 11 most Canadians would have had no idea what distinguishes Islam of the sort that we see in most parts of Senegal—a fairly tolerant and peaceful Sufism—from the kind of Islam that we see in parts of the Arab world, which often combines an intolerant and puritanical Wahhabi Islam with an intolerant and xenophobic Arab nationalism. This is the sort of Islam which underlies bin Laden, and other Arab terrorist groups like Islamic Jihad, but has little support in places like Senegal (or indeed in Afghanistan until recently). I think the media have done a very bad job in explaining the relationship between Arab nationalist struggles and Muslim religious movements. But this is absolutely crucial. There are issues about the Arab world, about Arab nationalism and about Arab-Israeli relations that have little to do with Islam in the rest of the world.

Most Muslims in the world live in Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, where there are no Arabs at all. They may have some emotional sympathies with some Arab nationalist conflicts, but no more direct connection than that. My hope is that at the end of this long process Canadians will understand that although there are definitely some Islamic organizations and networks that we need to worry about from a security point of view, there's also a great diversity of Islamic views, and that it's not Islam as such that is the problem but that specific versions of it have been twisted.

William Watson: Your earlier comments suggest you weren't necessarily

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against strong action, but the strong action that has been taken now has the educational disadvantage that it's causing riots everywhere in Islam. So the first message people are getting is that there aren't these distinctions.

Will Kymlicka: Well, not everywhere. There've been very few riots or street protests so far amongst Muslim groups in Western Europe or North America or even Central Asia. But you're certainly right about South Asia and some parts of Africa. Bin Laden and the Taliban have managed to persuade many Muslims around the world that the U.S. bombings are an attack on Islam as such—a kind of new Christian crusade to conquer or reconquer Muslim lands. But most Muslims in the West know this isn't the case. On the contrary, it's the Taliban which is trying to overthrow the governments of various Muslim states—it's supporting rebellions in the Muslim countries of Central Asia, for example, like Uzbekistan or Tajikistan—on the grounds that they are not "pure" enough in their Islamic beliefs. Which partly explains why these Muslim countries—and others—are supporting the U.S. coalition. The Taliban is a threat to other Muslim countries as well as to the West, and many Muslims around the world know this.

This is the sort of intra-Islamic struggle which is not well known in Canada, and unfortunately many spokespersons for the Muslim community in Canada don't like to discuss it either. There have been some attempts by the media in Canada to allow spokespersons for Islamic groups to present their views. But they're not always saying what mainstream Canadians need to hear. I've seen several articles by spokespersons for Islamic groups in Canada who basically just say pieties about how anyone who is a good Muslim believes in peace and brotherhood. Which is fine, and worth saying. But Canadians also need to know more about the geopolitics of Islam and why what's going on in Afghanistan is the result of a specific confluence of factors that is not representative of Islam in general.

William Watson: I don't know if you saw the post-Sept. 11 episode of *The West Wing*, where they took on this issue. Their parallel was that Islamic terrorists are to Islam as what is to Christianity? And their answer was the KKK.

Will Kymlicka: I think you can find analogies in the KKK or Timothy McVeigh, who was a member of a Protestant church. But there are analogies in the Orthodox world, too. Many of the war crimes that were committed in Bosnia or Chechnya by the Serbian and Russian soldiers were committed in the name of defending the Orthodox faith against the Muslim infidels. And, of course, there is a violent strand of Jewish fundamentalism —remember Baruch Goldstein, who went in and massacred 29 Muslims in Hebron in 1994. Every religion has it—Sikhs and Hindus, as well. We could find Catholic extremists, too, for instance in the IRA.

But the point is that, with respect to Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism, Canadians now have a reasonably sophisticated understanding that just because you hear about Catholics killing Protestants in Northern Ireland doesn't mean you need to worry about the Polish Catholic who lives down the street. We don't equate Catholicism with terrorism, because we know that religion is just one factor in a specific political and nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland, and we separate all that from Catholicism in general.

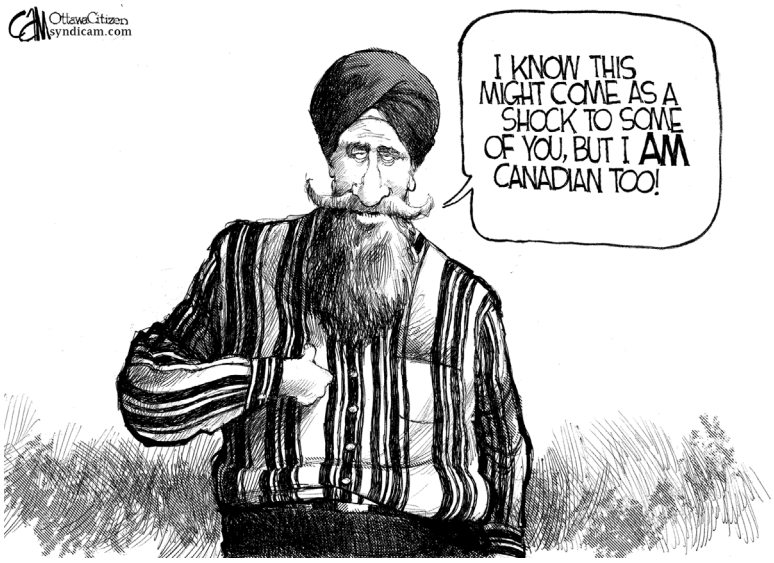
But that's the kind of learning process that Canada as a country has not had an opportunity to go through with Islam. It's going to take time. And I suspect that it will probably get worse before it gets better. But the point is we're going to have to go through that anyway. If the position of Muslims in Canada is going to be secure and comfortable, in both directions, then we're going to have to develop that level of understanding of Islam that we now take for granted with respect to

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Christianity and Judaism. We have to talk about the full range of strands, from liberal, secular Islam to the religiously pious and peaceful, to the violent religious radicals—this is true of all the great religious traditions in the world.

William Watson: To be devil's advocate, an alternate hypothesis is that Canadians are not necessarily concerned about religious fundamentalism and the possibility of violence, though they are clearly concerned about that, but their deeper concern is to have people assimilate—even though that's not our official ideology and it's not our official policy. In visible ways, people from these communities don't assimilate. They wear what strikes us as strange garb, and have religious practices we're not familiar with. Isn't it overly optimistic to say that Canadians are anxious about the extremist strains but are very tolerant apart from that?

Will Kymlicka: Yes and no. Certainly, whenever there is visible difference, whether it's skin color or behaviour, then there is an initial mixture of curiosity, fear, discomfort and anxiety. That's universal and Canadians have it as well. But in the big cities—and that's really where all the action is on these issues—what is it they're being assimilated to? I mean, 40 years ago there was an Anglo-British core culture which people could assimilate to in theory. There was a kind of mainstream and you could then judge to what extent people were assimilat-



ing into it. But in big cities today, it's just one mass of diversity.

To be sure, society is held together by a common language, by some common political and legal institutions, and particularly amongst the younger generation, by a certain kind of Americanized mass popular culture. But when you're talking about public schools in which over 50 per cent of the kids are the children of immigrants, over 50 per cent are non-white, and over 50 per cent are non-Christian, what is the mainstream?

Actually, I am quite optimistic about the extent to which Canadians have accepted that there is no return to assimilation in any meaningful sense, and that we are a multi-racial, multi-faith, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society. Most Canadians accept that people will be visibly different in what they wear, what they eat, how they pray, what kind of music they listen to, what games and recreation they play, and so on.

What Canadians want and expect is that immigrants be peaceful, law-abiding, and loyal to the country. Immigrants are expected to become "Canadians," which is partly a matter of accepting individual rights and democracy and equality, and partly a matter of being loyal and productive citizens who are willing to do their fair share to build up society, to maintain it and develop it. But most Canadians accept that you can't go much beyond that in the sense of expecting any more thorough kind of assimilation.

Things are different in smaller rural areas, where there is still a kind of almost monolithic Anglo-British culture, and where immigrants stand out more, as something exotic and perhaps threatening. But when I spend time in Toronto or Montreal, or Ottawa even, it's clear that Canadians have learned to live with a level of ethnic diversity that's quite extraordinary. And it's relatively new. It really only started kicking in when they changed the immigration policies in the mid-1960s.

In a relatively short period of time, we have grown accustomed to the fact that when we get on the bus or the subway or when we go to school or the workplace, we expect to be sitting and working beside people who have different racial origins or religions. That's just normal now. This may seem like a strange example, but I was recently in Budapest (I teach in Budapest once a year), and got on the subway and every person on the subway was white. I felt like it was a science-fiction movie—that somehow an extraterrestrial power had waved their wand and turned everyone white. It was just the strangest thing.

William Watson: I have a theory that all the world subways look alike and they're all wonderfully polyglot. Budapest is an outlier, I guess.

Will Kymlicka: I think Canadians are really quite comfortable with many "visible minorities," like the East Asians. You know, there is now even a kind of myth about the East Asian immigrants as a model. They've gone from being pariahs—the Chinese and Japanese weren't eligible for citizenship, and we barred them from immigration—to being paragons, the perfect immigrants. They're often seen as hard-working, peaceful, law-abiding and economically prosperous.

There is some mythology to that. There are still tensions about the integration of East Asians, and many face prejudice and social barriers. But still, I think they would have to be seen as a success story. And it's not just the Hong Kong Chinese, who were already fairly wealthy when they arrived—it's also the Vietnamese and the Koreans. There are large numbers of people who come from very different cultures, with no experience of liberal democracy, and they have integrated effectively, not just economically and educationally, but they're also participating in the political system, they're on our TV as newscasters and as DJs on MTV and so on. And that's all gone quite well, in some ways better than anyone could have reasonably expected or predicted.

To my mind, that says that Canadians are not virulent racists, and there is no deep nativism that feels threatened by the very idea of immigrants or ethnic diversity. Canadians no longer

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try to exclude or assimilate all forms of visible immigrant diversity. But there is this kind of nagging, unconscious concern about certain groups, including certain kinds of religion.

This is something we haven't talked about as a society. If you look at the government documents, or multicultural education curriculum in schools, they shy away from some hard questions about the way religions, all religions, are interpreted and used in different ways. So we've done reasonably well in producing a population that feels comfortable with the general idea of ethnic and cultural diversity and religious diversity, too, in a general way. But when it gets down to some specifics, we still have hard work to do.

William Watson: Our traditional idea of the way our society is built, with this tolerance and diversity, is different from our idea of the way United States is built, with its melting pot and stronger view of civil liberties and individualism. It's a cliché now to talk about how galvanizing this experience has been for the United States, and how great a communitarian spirit you observe there. Do you think that in this respect, they *are* as different as we suppose, that there is still a melting pot? And do you think if we should have such an experience as Sept. 11—God forbid, but it's on the radar screen now—that we will react with such strong communitarinism?

Will Kymlicka: I don't agree with the "American melting pot versus Canadian mosaic" contrast. I don't think that anyone who has ever studied these issues has agreed with it. This is one of those myths or metaphors that keeps popping up. In every generation, almost every couple of years, there is an academic demolition of that comparison, and yet it keeps bouncing back.

If we look at public policies, at how one becomes a citizen, at what kids are taught about diversity and tolerance, at what immigrants need to do in order to be accepted by their neighbors and co-citizens, Canadians and Americans are really no different. We have the same expectations, both informally and in terms of public policies and laws. There is very little difference. Certainly, we're much closer to each other than we are to European countries, most of which have a completely different approach to immigration.

Canada and the U.S. have the same basic picture that immigrants need to learn a common language, need to accept basic political values of individual rights and democracy, need to participate in some common legal and political and educational institutions, and need to be loyal to the country. But beyond that, immigrants are free to maintain their culture and religion and diversity. That basic package is the same in both Canada and the United States. Some people say both countries are multiculturalist, others say we're both assimilationist—it depends on your political perspective—but in any event, we're basically similar.

In terms of the communitarian response to threats, the reaction in the United States wasn't surprising to me. It's a deeply patriotic society. It's true of course, that there is also a very deep belief in individual rights and in individual responsibility—that you should be responsible for your success and failure, and so on. But that is itself part of a national mythology. It's not that people believe in some universalistic principle of individualism unrelated to their national identity—it's rather that taking individual responsibility is part of what it means to be an American. In the States, celebrating individual rights is, in part, a way of manifesting one's membership in the nation, and one's pride in its Constitution and its historic role in developing democracy and individual rights. American individualism is not at all a denial of the importance of national identity or national membership. On the contrary, "individualistic" Americans are willing to make extraordinary sacrifices for the defense of their nation. Think of World War II: the level of community mobilization that the Americans can muster is equal to any in the world and so is their level of patriotism and their willingness to make sacrifices for the country.

I think it's a serious mistake to suppose that changing the American policy on Iraq or the Palestinians would remove the threat of terrorism. On the contrary, both Hussein and Arafat are precisely the sort of secular ruler which bin Laden opposes (and indeed both rulers have tried to suppress Islamic radicalism).

Now, many Americans are not terribly keen on making sacrifices for the less well-off. A crude way to think of it is that Americans have high levels of patriotism but low levels of solidarity, in the social democratic sense of redistributing income from the well-off to the disadvantaged. Some people think that Canada is the reverse, that we have fairly high levels of solidarity and not much patriotism. But I think that if and when something happens in Canada on the scale of Sept. 11, we'll turn out to be very patriotic as well. Public opinion polls show that Canadians are more proud of their country than most Western countries—certainly far more proud of their country than in virtually any European country. In the Netherlands, only something like 15 per cent of people feel proud of their country. It's completely un-cool to be proud of your country in most parts of Western Europe. Whereas in both Canada and the United States, it's not un-cool at all. We're quiet about it in Canada, but that quiet pride runs very deep.

William Watson: You said earlier that just after Sept. 11 you didn't want to say anything publicly for fear of being accused of something you don't believe in. I thought you were suggesting that it's possible to believe both that there should be a strong response

Some people seem to make the assumption that if we just got the foreign policy right, that would eliminate the sources of anti-Americanism. I'm afraid that's probably not the case. Given the muddiness and complexity of the world, even the best foreign policies will still generate some kinds of hatred.

against terrorism and that there are root causes that may have to be addressed.

Will Kymlicka: Part of the difficulty is figuring out what precisely are the root causes. Many people have argued that the root causes are the American-led sanctions against Iraq, and the American support for Israeli occupation of the occupied territories. But if you think about it, the first real manifestation of anti-Western Islamic radicalism was the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which was not about either Iraq or Israel. The Iranian revolution was a reaction against their own corrupt and authoritarian ruler—the Shah of Iran—and his failed project of modernization. Ayatollah Khomeini then sponsored attempts to overthrow other secular leaders in other Muslim countries. And that's the pattern we see again today with bin Laden, who wants to overthrow the Saudi government, and with the Taliban, which wants to overthrow neighbouring governments in Central Asia. Iraqi sanctions and Israeli occupation are not their main concern.

Here again we see intra-Islamic struggles—struggles between secular Muslim rulers and their fundamentalist Muslim opposition. And the U.S. is targeted, not primarily because of its attacks on Iraq or its support of Israel, but because it is seen as siding with the secular rulers. It propped up the Shah of Iran, and continues to prop up the secular rulers in Egypt or Saudi Arabia whom the fundamentalists want to overthrow. I'm sure that one goal of the terrorist action is to try to get the U.S. to wash its hands of the region, and thereby cut its dealings with these secular Muslim regimes.

So I think it's a serious mistake to suppose that changing the American policy on Iraq or the Palestinians would remove the threat of terrorism. On the contrary, both Hussein and Arafat are precisely the sort of secular ruler which bin Laden opposes (and indeed both rulers have tried to suppress Islamic radicalism). Bin Laden has no interest in trying to bolster the power of Hussein or Arafat, any more than he wants greater American support for Mubarak in Egypt or Abdullah in Saudi Arabia. More American money or support for secular Arab leaders is the last thing bin Laden wants.

The "root causes" are very complicated. America might be less of a target for terrorism if it tried to be more neutral in the internal struggle between secularists and fundamentalists in the Arab world. But the problem is that America thinks it needs the support of secular Muslim countries, partly for reasons of oil and/or military bases (as with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and Turkey), and partly in order to make peace in the Middle East (as with Jordan and Egypt). The Americans rely on these secular regimes to contain popular opposition to normalizing relations with Israel.

So for a variety of reasons it would be difficult for Americans to cut off all their alliances with secular Muslim states. What the States (and Canada) can do, I think, is to do more to promote democracy and economic development within these secular regimes, so that they have greater legitimacy amongst their own citizens. Even if the U.S. needs the support of secular Muslim states, it can certainly do a better job pressuring these states to be less corrupt and repressive, just as it can do a better job pressuring Israel to accept a viable Palestinian state. This should reduce support for the radical opposition, and in the long term, might slowly dry up the pool of money and manpower for terrorist groups.

But even the wisest of policies will not satisfy the radicals in Iran or Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia. Even the best U.S. policies will provide more support to Israel, and more support to secular Arab states, than bin Laden will accept. Some people seem to make the assumption that if we just got the foreign policy right, that would eliminate the sources of anti-Americanism. That's probably not the case. Given the muddiness and complexity of the world, even the best foreign policies will still generate some kinds of hatred. Even if the U.S. did a better job of playing an honest broker in the Middle East, we would still have the problem of anti-Americanism and violent forms of religious extremism. And so we need to maintain our vigilance about terrorism, and we need to think about international alliances to contain it and to penalize the states which sponsor it.

William Watson: Thanks very much for doing this.

Dissent A lot of thinking needs to be done, and perhaps is being done in Washington and elsewhere, about the ineptitude of American intelligence and counter-intelligence, about options available to American foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East, and about what constitutes a smart program of military defense. But the public is not being asked to bear much of the burden of reality. The unanimously applauded, self-congratulatory bromides of a Soviet Party Congress seemed contemptible. The unanimity of the sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric spouted by American officials and media commentators in recent days seems, well, unworthy of a mature democracy…

"Our country is strong," we are told again and again. I for one don't find this entirely consoling. Who doubts that America is strong? But that's not all America has to be.

Susan SONTAG, *The New Yorker*