

UNDERSTANDING
AMERICA

THE ANATOMY OF AN
EXCEPTIONAL NATION

PETER H. SCHUCK AND JAMES Q. WILSON, EDITORS

FROM ITS VERY FOUNDING, America has been the subject of fascination, scrutiny, criticism, praise, and misconception. The task of understanding this deeply perplexing nation is no easy one. But one theme has remained constant: that of America's uniqueness—or, as nineteenth-century observer Alexis de Tocqueville put it—its exceptionalism. Because America's polarizations can be extreme—from ruthless capitalism to selfless philanthropy, fervent religious belief to scientific pragmatism, intense patriotism to anti-government activism, superfluous wealth to extreme poverty—it remains unlike any other developed nation.

Understanding America is a comprehensive portrait of this complex nation: its values, institutions, and public policies; its successes and its challenges. In twenty new essays, the nation's top scholars draw on their extensive knowledge of American institutions to explain the most important and intriguing facets of American society. From the history and construction of race to the evolving American family to the debate surrounding immigration, these scholars offer their unparalleled critical insight into how, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the American experiment has fared. The resulting picture is at once highly informative, unflinchingly analytical, and full of paradox.

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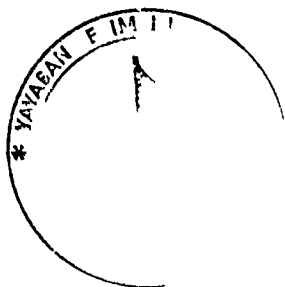
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