

THE  
VIRTUES  
OF  
LIBERALISM

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## INTRODUCTION

### Rethinking America's Liberal Tradition

America!  
Land created in common,  
Dream nourished in common,  
Keep your hand on the plow! Hold on!  
If the house is not yet finished,  
Don't be discouraged, builder!  
If the fight is not yet won,  
Don't be weary, soldier!  
The plan and the pattern is here,  
Woven from the beginning  
Into the warp and woof of America:  
ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL.

—Langston Hughes,  
“Freedom's Plow”<sup>1</sup>

This book issues the summons of Langston Hughes to American liberals: “KEEP YOUR HANDS ON THE PLOW! HOLD ON!” For fifty years now the ideas and policies of American liberalism have been on the defensive, first against charges of communism or socialism, more recently against charges of moral as well as economic apostasy. The time has come to reconsider the ideals that inspired generations of Americans to see the rich potential of political engagement as well as the value of private pursuits, to acknowledge the importance of public deliberation about the meanings of our shared standards of liberty and justice for all. The time has come to proclaim again what James Madison termed the “necessary

