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and in opposing the French Revolution, they proved to be hopelessly out of step with the times.

Unfortunately, this argument about the decline of the Federalists is really one of two books struggling to emerge from the roughly three and a half pounds of smallish print here. The other is a conventional survey of the period, and both books suffer from their cohabitation between the same covers. Oddly, something that would have greatly enhanced both, an extended discussion of the economic and demographic forces that reshaped the country during the Federalist years, is missing. A delightful chapter-long digression on the siting and construction of the new national capital, which itself contains digressions on matters such as the Egyptian hieroglyph for "city," is typical of the book's charms. Read as a kind of Federalist era omnibus, it succeeds.

**AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURES.** *By Richard Ellis. Oxford Univ. Press. 251 pp. \$45*

Whatever else may be said about it, revisionism is scholarship's one dependable growth industry. Ellis, a history-minded political scientist, here offers a new critique of Louis Hartz's decades-old "consensus theory." According to that much-attacked theory, political and social disagreements in America occur within the dominant and largely unchallenged framework of liberal capitalism.

Ellis urges historians to cast aside Hartz and consider the more capacious model of anthropologist Mary Douglas. While consensus scholars deem competitive individualism the defining aspect of the American social and political experience, Douglas finds it to be one of five "competing cultural biases." The other four are hierarchical collectivism, egalitarianism, fatalism, and "hermitude." (That's three more "isms" and one more "tude," for those keeping score.)

Ellis finds challenges to competitive individualism everywhere: in Puritan New England, with its strong group orientation and orthodox community rules that limited individual autonomy; in the socialist utopian communities of the mid-19th century; in Jane Addams's Hull House, which, as Addams said, provided "little islands of affection in the vast sea of impersonal forces."

Louis Hartz believed that the absence of feudal-

ism in America meant that it never developed hierarchical political and social cultures. But Ellis finds a great deal of hierarchy in American social life: among Virginia's Anglican gentry, among 19th-century New England Federalists, in the civil-service reform movement of the late 19th century, and, of course, in the system of slavery.

Armed with new data and theories on race and class, scholars have been attacking the consensus theory with some success since the 1960s. Ellis brings a new historical/anthropological dimension to this campaign. Unfortunately, the framework he proposes is somewhat strained. He occasionally ignores the complexity of historical figures and movements, and seems perplexed when they don't fit neatly into his pigeonholes. "Paine's credo was 'question authority' and Madison's was 'check authority,'" he writes, citing Madison's success at limiting executive authority in the Constitution. But look harder: Madison's original draft, known as the Virginia Plan, provided for a truly powerful national executive and a congress that could veto state legislation.

What Ellis inadvertently shows is that there *has* always been a consensus: a consensus of contradictory attitudes. Americans—the People of Paradox, as Michael Kammen put it 20 years ago—have agreed to disagree. Of course, *how* the country has been able to live with antithetical beliefs without ripping apart at the seams remains the unanswered question.

### *Arts & Letters*

**THE BEGINNING OF THE JOURNEY: The Marriage of Diana and Lionel Trilling.** *By Diana Trilling. Harcourt Brace. 442 pp. \$24.95*

Long before his death in 1975, Lionel Trilling—University Professor at Columbia and perhaps the most distinguished literary critic in America—was a distant figure. It was widely believed that he had refined himself out of existence. If Morningside Heights were England, one ex-student griped, he would have been known as "Professor Sir Lionel Trilling." When he spoke of human consciousness, he characteristically dropped the definite article and addressed himself directly to "mind," as if it were a downstairs neighbor.