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# Introduction

American companies used to make things. In the United States. With American workers. Manufacturing drove economic growth in the twentieth century. It made the United States the most powerful nation in the world and paved the way for the American-styled global capitalism of the twenty-first century. Manufacturing gave birth to industrial unions, shaped US politics, and, at its height, employed one in four American workers. When it declined in the late twentieth century, it took organized labor and the Democrats' New Deal coalition down with it. Manufacturing still exists in the United States, of course, but it is now a mere economic sector, no longer the central measure of growth, and no longer a major source of employment.

This is the story of manufacturing's main lobbyist and trade association, the National Association of Manufacturers, more commonly known as NAM.<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1895 to expand foreign trade, it became known for its staunch, at times extreme conservatism, expressed in its ardent defense of "free enterprise" and unending battle against unions and government regulation. The industrialists who led NAM were proud capitalists. They nurtured and defended capitalism, extolled its virtues, fought its enemies, and built its institutions. NAM was thus front and center in all of the major political struggles over the shape of the US political economy. It battled organized labor, defended employers' rights, opposed the New Deal, and staked out positions in myriad contests over taxation, trade, patents, and government

1. I refer to it throughout as "NAM." Elsewhere the acronym is sometimes preceded by "the" ("the NAM") or, when spoken, sometimes spelled out ("N-A-M").

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regulations. Its members were soldiers for the conservative movement that gave us Barry Goldwater and later Ronald Reagan. Thus, political scientists and historians have written extensively about NAM, mostly in the context of lobbying, labor, and US conservatism, and mostly from the perspective of its many critics.

But NAM was also liberal and progressive. It promoted international trade, encouraged intercultural understanding and education, and welcomed women and the disabled into the workforce. It supported the United Nations (UN) and the Marshall Plan and called for an end to trade barriers. NAM encouraged companies to modernize and adopt innovations such as safety standards, workmen's compensation, and affirmative action. It published "best practices" guidelines and informed employers of the latest research on management, trade, and regulatory standards. In other words, while conservative, NAM was also forward-looking, innovative, and progressive—much like capitalism itself.<sup>2</sup>

This book examines NAM in the context of US manufacturing and twentieth-century capitalism. It traces NAM's role in the development of industrial capitalism, freer trade, and global economic integration, highlighting the organization's progressive, modernizing impulses as much as its conservative reflexes. By "progressive," I mean its role in crafting a variety of reforms and policies—such as tariff reform, more open borders, and affirmative action—that changed the national landscape and helped manufacturers adapt to new circumstances and opportunities. These types of reform "moved history forward" and were surprisingly compatible with NAM's anti-unionism. Although not as powerful as its enemies believed, nor as effective as it hoped, NAM nonetheless worked in concert with the US government and international institutions to shape twentieth-century capitalism in the United States and the world.

This globalizing impulse was not without consequence: a large part of this story is about how NAM's support for the free flow of goods, services, and currency across national boundaries not only divided the organization but also contributed to deindustrialization and the closing of thousands of US factories, many of them NAM members. The post-industrial, global, finance- and tech-based economy we live in today is partly the result of NAM's

2. Many people have argued that capitalism is progressive, including Karl Marx, but more recently see Joyce Appleby, *The Relentless Revolution: A History of Capitalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), and Edmund Fawcett, *Liberalism: The Life of an Idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

century-long promotion of trade expansion and economic integration.<sup>3</sup> The great irony here is that in shaping trade and economic policies to fit their global interests and ambitions, the industrialists who led NAM undermined their own political and economic power. Did they know this? Could they have anticipated it? These questions and others will be addressed in the chapters ahead, which offer both an examination of how NAM worked (and didn't work) and an argument about NAM as a capitalist modernizer.

## NAM as Capitalist Modernizer

Historians and political scientists have examined NAM first and foremost as a lobbyist for corporate capitalism and have thus focused overwhelmingly on its role in US politics, in which it represented the conservative opposition to the labor movement, liberals, environmentalists, and government regulations.<sup>4</sup> I have no quibble with these analyses. NAM *was* conservative, especially in its political activity, and I will be examining the forms its conservatism took throughout this book. But the question I am asking is different: What did NAM do for the manufacturers it represented? And given the centrality of manufacturing to the US economy, how did NAM's efforts shape capitalism? In addressing these questions, the more progressive side of the organization necessarily comes into focus. Recognizing these progressive tendencies not only provides a more textured understanding of this particular organization but also helps explain US manufacturing's rise and unlikely survival in a post-industrial age.

To understand how a conservative, anti-union organization can also be seen as progressive, it helps to remember how unorganized and chaotic US capitalism was at the end of the nineteenth century, when NAM was founded. Imagine investing money or producing goods in an economy with

3. In this regard, this book draws from and contributes to the recent literature on the history of twentieth-century capitalism, which includes works like Gerald F. Davis, *Managed by the Markets: How Finance Reshaped America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Louis Hyman, *Debtor Nation: The History of America in Red Ink* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Youn Ki, "Large Industrial Firms and the Rise of Finance in Late Twentieth-Century America," *Enterprise and Society* 19, no. 4 (2018): 903–45.

4. Most recently, see Kim Phillips-Fein *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), Kevin Kruse, *One Nation under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), and Allan J. Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

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no centrally regulated currency, with no standardized measures or weights, and with laws preventing the sharing of information about pricing, wages, and technical innovation. Imagine proposing economic policies when most people saw the economy as a simple interaction between competing individuals, rather than as a system that could be understood, coordinated, and rationalized. Historians often characterize nineteenth-century American capitalism as unregulated, but that is not entirely true. Individual states regulated enterprises and trade, creating a patchwork of legal hurdles to interstate trade, akin to international trade barriers. To fulfill its promise nationally capitalism had to be reorganized and reformed. This was the work NAM took up.

NAM was not alone in this endeavor. In the early 1900s, all of the major players—manufacturers, workers, local and state government officials, wholesalers, retailers, transporters, and the US government—formed associations, unions, or agencies to bring order to the economic chaos, to standardize and regulate practices, and to coordinate and rationalize economic activity. Historians have since dubbed this activity “progressive,” in that it was reform that defined in part the Progressive Era, but also because these initiatives helped Americans adapt their political and economic systems to new innovations and realities, which were generally seen as “progress” in that they bettered humans’ material existence.<sup>5</sup> In twists and turns, this activity led to what historian Martin Sklar has called “the corporate reconstruction of capitalism,” by which a new, cooperative, corporate form of capitalism, based on large conglomerations, information-sharing, and long-term planning, supplanted an older, proprietary, competitive form of capitalism in the early twentieth century.<sup>6</sup>

5. See especially Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966). I see no need to go over the scholarly debates about the Progressive Era, but on the concept of progress in US history, see Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).

6. A large body of literature is devoted to this transformation in American capitalism. I have relied mostly on Martin Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), but the transition was identified earlier by Adolph Berle and Gardiner Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (1932; New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967); James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* (New York: John Day Co., 1941); and William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1961). The transition was finally fully elaborated as a historical phenomenon by Alfred Chandler Jr., *The Visible Hand* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), and Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), among others.

In this new economy, organization and cooperation replaced “rugged individualism,” a concept that continued as myth but no longer defined economic actors, if it ever had. The main economic actors were now large corporations presided over by a phalanx of managers and boards of directors and driven more by data and policy than by character or luck.<sup>7</sup> Economists, trade associations, and government officials tracked economic activity, collecting trade and labor statistics in an attempt to coordinate and shape the national economy. The New Deal and World War II furthered these centralizing tendencies, naturalizing the large corporation as an economic inevitability. In 1950, management guru Peter Drucker declared individualism irrelevant: “it is not individuals who produce but a human organization,” that is, the professionally managed, multidivisional, multinational corporation.<sup>8</sup> While NAM vigorously defended American individualism, its leaders represented the large multi-unit corporations that had snuffed out individualism and welcomed corporate-friendly government policies.

International trade was likewise in need of rationalization and standardization, beginning with transportation, legal protections, and payment collection. Those who were charting a truly global economy in the wake of the Great Depression hoped to develop internationally agreed upon laws of property and contract that would loosen trade restrictions and protect foreign investments.<sup>9</sup> Here, too, NAM stepped up, working with international organizations, such as the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the Inter-American Council, and the United Nations, as well as the US State Department, in setting up international trade regulations and selecting representatives for the International Labor Organization (ILO). It also participated in the development of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Its international programs and activism helped acclimate a largely parochial and protectionist membership to the ideas of reciprocity, freer trade, and international cooperation.

In trying to bring order to capitalism both at home and internationally, NAM worked closely with the government, especially the US Commerce

7. On this organization-centric economy and its “social responsibility” ethos, see Peter Drucker, *The New Society* (1950; New York: Harper & Row, 1962), and Davis, *Managed by the Markets*, chap. 1.

8. Drucker, *The New Society*, 207.

9. This characterization is from the Austrian School economist Lionel Robbins; see Slobodian, *Globalists*, chap. 3, which examines the Austrian School economists as early “neoliberals.” For a more positive view of this endeavor, see Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

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and State Departments. Although NAM claimed to act in the name of “free enterprise” and against “government interference,” a totally “free” market such as existed in its rhetoric was the last thing it actually wanted. From the start, NAM was dedicated to supporting legal arrangements and institutions that insulated the market from the vagaries of politics and greed, otherwise known as democracy and competition. It put its trust not in “the market,” but in experts and bureaus that collected statistics for use in business planning, in laws and regulations that protected corporate autonomy and private property, and in international institutions that stabilized currency and underwrote credit.

Despite its largely Republican and protectionist membership, NAM’s economic aims were very much in line with the liberal internationalism of the Democratic Party, as represented by Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Bill Clinton. Like NAM, liberal Democrats sought to spread American influence abroad and make the world safe for American-style capitalism. NAM raised nary a peep as Democratic administrations transferred trade authority from Congress (which represented sectional and local interests) to the executive branch (which represented national interests) and finally to the WTO (which represented the interests of international business). It is not without significance that the first sitting president to speak at NAM was the liberal Democrat John Kennedy. Still, trade expansion was always a divisive issue for NAM, a large portion of whose members supported protection. Accordingly, NAM globalists pulled their punches until the 1960s, treading carefully so as to avoid a blowup. Nonetheless, NAM’s leadership consistently, if quietly, favored Democratic policies in the area of trade expansion. The last two NAM presidents of the twentieth century were Democrats.

Finally, to the extent that capitalism is a driver of change, NAM acted to help its members accept change, with respect to both technological and social innovations. As an ideology and an economic system, capitalism directs its adherents to find the next new thing—the next new invention, market, product, labor source—that can be exploited to make a fortune. In seeking innovation and newness, capitalists embrace change, even when it challenges social custom and their own preconceptions.<sup>10</sup> While manufacturers in NAM harbored the common race, gender, and cultural prejudices

10. This perspective was articulated most famously by Friedrich Hayek’s “Why I Am Not a Conservative,” published in his book *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960) and available at: [https://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/excerpt/2011/hayek\\_constitution.html](https://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/excerpt/2011/hayek_constitution.html).

of the twentieth century, some were quick to overcome these if there was a profit to be made or a regulation to be sidestepped. Thus, NAM promoted intercultural understanding in part to exploit markets abroad. It welcomed the immigrants its members needed to keep unions out and wages low. It advocated the hiring of women in part to get around unions. During the civil rights era, NAM encouraged its members to integrate their factories—and instructed them in how to do so—to avoid further legislation. Its motives may have been selfish, but the net result helped change attitudes and policies.

## **NAM as an Organization**

In addition to examining NAM's role in organizing and globalizing capitalism, I explore how it worked, who it represented, and how effective it was as a lobbyist. I also identify its many internal tensions. As a workplace and a (nonprofit) business, NAM was shaped as much by concerns over membership and morale as it was by politics and ideology. Its modernizing, developmental, free-trade impulses exacerbated fissures within the organization—fissures between protectionists and free-traders, pragmatists and ideologues, small concerns and large corporations, staff members and board leaders, anticommunists and those interested in trading with communists. While its enemies saw NAM as a powerful, unified lobby, NAM leaders fretted about how to keep the divided organization afloat. So split was NAM on the tariff issue, for instance, that it took no official position on it, which made it a poor lobbyist for 100 percent of its membership.

From the start, small and medium-sized companies of fewer than 500 employees made up the majority (around 80 to 85 percent) of NAM members, simply because smaller companies represented the majority of manufacturing concerns in general. NAM's programs, data, and services helped them become more modern and efficient, while its pro-industry, anti-union lobbying formed a community of interests and networks for them. NAM needed its small members to bolster its numbers and legitimacy, but it depended on large corporations for financial support, and in the end those were the interests it most fully served.

NAM was governed by a board of directors, made up of representatives from member companies. Eventually numbering over 200, the board of directors elected a president, officers, and a vice president from each state in which it had members; these officers in turn also sat on the board. Members sat on policy committees, formulating policies on such topics as conservation, taxation, patents, and international relations, which were then



TABLE 1.1. NAM Presidents, 1895–2004

Year	President	Company	Product/industry	Location
1895	Thomas Dolan	Thomas Dolan & Company	Wool	Philadelphia, PA
1896–1901	Theodore Search	John B. Stetson Company	Wool, hats	Philadelphia, PA
1902–1905	David Parry	Parry Manufacturing Company	Carriages, pipe-fittings	Indianapolis, IN
1906–1908	James Van Cleave	Buck's Stove and Range Company	Stoves	St. Louis, MO
1909–1912	John Kirby Jr.	Dayton Manufacturing Company	Railroad equipment	Dayton, OH
1913–1917	George Pope	Pope Manufacturing Company	Bicycles	Hartford, CT
1918–1920	Stephen Mason	McConway and Torley Company	Railroad equipment	Pittsburgh, PA
1921–1931	John Edgerton	Lebanon Woolen Mills	Textiles	Lebanon, TN
1932–1933	Robert Lund	Lambert Pharmaceutical Company	Listerine, toothpaste	St. Louis, MO
1934–1935	Clinton L. Bardo	New York Shipbuilding Corporation	Shipbuilding	Camden, NJ
1936	Colby M. Chester	General Foods, Inc.	Food products	New York, NY
1937	W. B. Warner	McCall Corporation	Publishing	New York, NY
1938	Charles R. Hook	American Rolling Mill Company, Inc.	Steel	Columbus, OH
1939	Howard Coonley	Walworth Company	Valves, pipe-fittings	New York, NY
1940	H. W. Prentiss Jr.	Armstrong Cork Company	Linoleum, floor coverings	Lancaster, PA
1941	Walter Fuller	Curtis Publishing Company	Magazines	Philadelphia, PA
1942	William Witherow	Blaw-Knox Company	Road paving equipment	Blaw-Knox, PA
1943	Frederick Crawford	Thompson Product Company	Steel products	Euclid, OH
1944	Robert Gaylord	Ingersoll Milling Machine Company	Machine tools	Rockford, IL
1945	Ira Mosher	Russell Harrington	Cutlery	Southbridge, MA
1946	Robert R. Wason	Manning, Maxwell, and Moore	Valves, cranes, hoists	Stratford, CT

1947	Earl Bunting	O'Sullivan Rubber	Rubber heels, plastics	Winchester, VA
1948	Morris Sayre	Corn Products Refining Company	Starch, sugar, syrup	Illinois
1949	Wallace Bennett	Bennett's Paint Company	Paint	Salt Lake City, UT
1950	Claude A. Putnam	Markhem Machine	Packaging machinery	Keene, NH
1951	William H. Ruffin	Erwin Mills, Inc.	Textiles	Durham, NC
1952	William J. Grede	Grede Foundries, Inc.	Steel casings	Milwaukee, WI
1953	Charles R. Sligh, Jr.	Sligh Furniture Companies	Furniture	Grand Rapids, MI
1954	Harold McClellan	Old Colony Paint and Chemical Company	Paint, chemicals	Los Angeles, CA
1955	Harry Riter	Thomas A. Edison, Inc.	Electronics	West Orange, NJ
1956	Cola Parker	Kimberly Clark, Inc.	Paper, sanitary products	Neenah, WI
1957	Ernie Swigert	Hyster Company	Forklifts, earth-moving equipment	Portland, OR
1958	Milton Lightner	The Singer Manufacturing Company	Appliances	Elizabeth, NJ
1959	Stanley Hope	Esso Standard Oil (former president); SoundScriber Corporation	Oil; dictation equipment	New Haven, CT
1960	Rudy Bannow	Bridgeport Machines, Inc.	Machine tools	Bridgeport, CT
1961	Jack McGovern	US Rubber Company	Rubber, tires	New York, NY
1962	Donald J. Hardenbrook	American Creosoting Corporation	Paper, boxes, cardboard	New York, NY
1963–1972	Werner P. Gullander	General Dynamics, Inc.	Aerospace	Fort Worth, TX
1973–1976	E. Douglas Kenna	Carrier Corporation	Air conditioning	Syracuse, NY
1977–1979	Heath Larry	US Steel Corporation	Steel	Pittsburgh, PA
1980–1989	Alexander Trowbridge	Allied Chemical Corporation	Chemicals, oil, gas	Morristown, NJ
1990–2004	Jerry Jasinowski	US Department of Commerce	Public policy	Washington, DC

Source: Author's compilation from NAM annual reports.

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submitted for final approval by the board of directors and, if approved, executed by NAM staff.

A few generalizations can be made about NAM presidents over time. They overwhelmingly came from the industrial states of the Northeast and Midwest. Until the 1960s, they also tended to come from large companies, but not the largest corporations. Some of these companies, however, such as Armstrong Cork Company and Walworth Company, were very large multinational corporations that employed thousands in the United States and abroad. Others were considerably smaller. Executives from the largest US corporations, such as General Electric, General Motors, IBM, Standard Oil, and DuPont, were active and influential on the board of directors and on NAM committees, but their leaders never served as president. Beginning in 1961, NAM presidents were uniformly from large multinational corporations, and after 1990, they tended to come from government or other lobbying firms.

NAM's fortunes rose and fell with those of manufacturing, as indicated in its membership rates, which track the dramatic rise of manufacturing after the Great Depression, the onset of deindustrialization beginning in the 1960s, and the relative stasis since the 1970s. NAM's membership peaked in 1956–1957, when it reached 21,600 (or 22,000 according to NAM press releases).<sup>11</sup> NAM's membership was typically much lower than that of its main ally and rival, the US Chamber of Commerce, which included retailers, bankers, and service industries, as well as manufacturers. In 1976, when NAM considered a possible merger with the Chamber, its membership stood at thirteen thousand compared to the Chamber's robust membership of sixty thousand, and the Chamber's membership has only increased since then. Mergers, recession, and deindustrialization all contributed to high rates of attrition in NAM membership.

### **Liberals, Conservatives, and Neoliberals**

Identifying the economic, ideological, and institutional concerns that drove NAM actors offers insight into the evolving political taxonomies of our own day. So let me define my terms and connect NAM's story to an idea with

11. Membership data collected from NAM annual reports; proceedings of annual conventions; "Memberships and Resignations, 1949–1967," series 8, box 148, "Membership" folder, accession 1411, National Association of Manufacturers Records, Hagley Library and Museum, Wilmington, DE (hereafter cited as NAMR); "Membership Change Summaries, 1979–1997," in board of directors meeting minutes, series 13, NAMR.

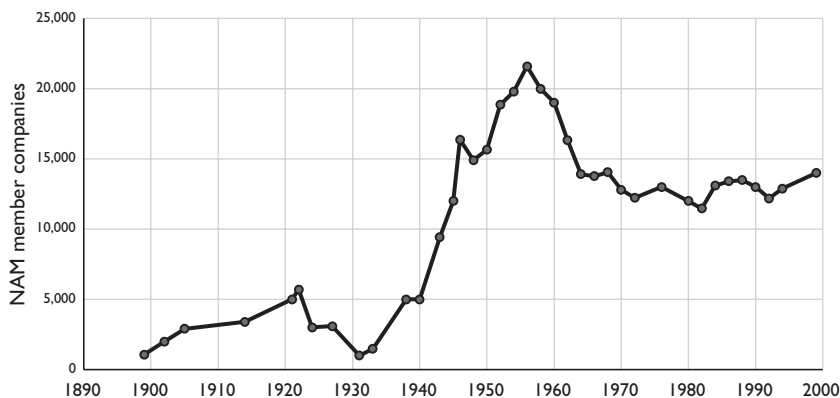


FIGURE I.1. NAM Membership, 1895–2000. *Source:* Author’s compilation from NAM annual reports and other sources.

growing relevance: neoliberalism. Let’s begin with “liberalism,” a notoriously slippery concept with a variety of changing meanings in the context of US politics and global capitalism over the course of the twentieth century. Most broadly, a strain of what I call “philosophical liberalism” shares a historical heritage with capitalism in terms of disrupting traditional hierarchies and customs, embracing change, prizing individual liberty, overturning barriers, promoting tolerance, crossing borders, valuing diversity, seeking peace, and defining progress as material improvement. This version of liberalism has been embraced by people around the world and is generally associated with progress, openness, and modernity.<sup>12</sup>

Relatedly, there is the liberalism of the “American liberal tradition,” which is associated with “rugged individualism,” John Locke, and Americans’ deep fear of overcentralized state power.<sup>13</sup> Sometimes called “classical liberalism,” this version of liberalism has defined US political conservatism since the early twentieth century. NAM leaders always championed this version of individualistic liberalism, even as they presided over impersonal mega-organizations and favored policies that expanded the government’s economic role.

12. Elements of this generic, baseline liberalism could, arguably, describe people as diverse as Voltaire, Mary Wollstonecraft, George Orwell, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Andrew Carnegie, Walter Reuther, Martin Luther King Jr., Gloria Steinem, Steve Jobs, and current-day trans activists, although it would not describe any of them completely. See Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* for an analysis of capitalism/liberalism as disruptive progress, and more recently, Fawcett, *Liberalism*, 1–26.

13. See Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955).

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In twentieth-century US politics, liberals were those people who embraced philosophical liberalism, as described here, but also wanted to regulate capitalism to stabilize its catastrophic boom-and-bust cycles and better distribute its progressive benefits in order to end poverty and “raise all ships.” Like all liberals, modern US liberals opposed concentration of power, which they saw in the monopoly power of large corporations, such as those that led NAM. They believed that labor unions and the state could be a check on large corporations. The crisis of the Great Depression enabled liberals to build a political coalition in the Democratic Party that strengthened both unions and what became the New Deal state.<sup>14</sup> Unions and the New Deal state thus became the cutting edge of progress and the liberal future; to oppose either—and NAM opposed both—would be to oppose progress, to be conservative.<sup>15</sup>

The New Deal state was nonetheless friendly to large corporations, who welcomed economic stabilization, as well as the expansion of international trade. The Democrats’ liberal internationalism affirmed the philosophical form of liberalism and also required a stronger state and a more active foreign policy, both of which were opposed by the Republican Party and traditional conservatives, but supported by large multinational corporations.<sup>16</sup> Democrats’ political rhetoric was geared toward capturing the votes of workers and liberals and thus downplayed the ways in which large corporations benefited from Democratic liberal internationalism.<sup>17</sup>

Although I am loath to wade into what I know is a quagmire, it cannot be ignored the extent to which Democratic liberal internationalism laid

14. For a description of US liberals, see Eric Alterman, *Why We’re Liberals* (New York: Viking, 2008), and Paul Krugman, *The Conscience of a Liberal* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007). The best new work on New Deal liberalism is Jefferson Cowie, *The Great Exception: The New Deal and the Limits of American Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

15. Unless one was opposing unions and the New Deal from the left.

16. On the New Deal’s liberal internationalism, see Thomas Ferguson, “Industrial Conflict and the Coming of the New Deal,” in Gary Gerstle and Steve Fraser, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 3–31.

17. Until, that is, the 1960s, when revisionist historians reminded Democrats that their policies had led to the Vietnam War. New Left revisionists saw the liberal internationalism of FDR and Truman as conservative, ignoring the fact that politically it was part of the New Deal, although some saw the New Deal as tainted by imperialism. See, for instance, William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959; New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), chaps. 6–8; Lloyd Gardner, *Imperial America: American Foreign Policy since 1898* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976); and, more recently, Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire* (New York: Verso, 2013). In contrast, Ferguson (“Industrial Conflict and the Coming of the New Deal”) offers a perspective similar to my own.

the groundwork for what many today call neoliberalism. “Neoliberalism” is a politicized term still very much in flux. Once an ideological accusation hurled at the ruling class, it has come to be used more historically to describe the global movement of goods, services, and capital that began to accelerate in the 1980s, accompanied by the simultaneous curtailment of national welfare states, regulation, and unions. Think Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.<sup>18</sup> In this definition, neoliberalism refers to the revival of classical liberal ideas, which in the United States were typically called “conservative.”

In US politics, “neoliberal” was also used to describe the “New Democrats” of the 1970s and 1980s—those like Paul Tsongas, Gary Hart, and eventually Bill Clinton who sought to shift the Democratic Party away from unions and welfare to the new economy of tech and trade.<sup>19</sup> In this case, the “neo” of “neoliberalism” described the updating of US liberalism in the Democratic Party. Since this happened alongside the Reagan Revolution, historians have seen it as part of a larger “turn to the right,” which the rest of the world called “neoliberal.” So what is known as neoliberalism internationally is examined in US historiography in the context of US conservatism.

But US conservatism was not historically the same thing as neoliberalism. A large part of what the rest of the world sees as neoliberalism—globalism and US interventionism—was not part of American conservatism, which was historically isolationist and protectionist, but instead was a characteristic of liberal democratic internationalism and tied to the liberal, New Deal, freer-trade Democratic Party. Yes, Republicans eventually got on board during (and because of) the Cold War, and even more so after the election of Ronald Reagan, but the institutional framework that allowed for the globalization of American capitalism was built by Democratic administrations.

Because analyses of neoliberalism are invariably critiques, they tend to underplay or ignore altogether the cosmopolitan openness of late-twentieth-century “neoliberalism” to immigration, diversity, and changing conceptions of gender and sexuality. Neoliberalism’s openness to these issues separates

18. See Manfred B. Steger and Ravi Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Panitch and Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism*, 14–17; and David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). The literature of neoliberalism is transnational and global, more concerned with NGOs and the World Bank than the American political economy per se; see Alfredo Saad-Fihlo and Deborah Johnston, eds., *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), and Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe, eds., *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

19. Randall Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals: Creating the New American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984).

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it from traditional conservatism and reflects its etymological origins in philosophical liberalism.<sup>20</sup> With the international resurgence of nationalism, including the rise of Trumpism in the United States, we can see more clearly the ways in which neoliberalism represents a cosmopolitan appreciation for diversity, even as it has created deeper economic and class inequality.

My understanding of neoliberalism has been influenced by Quinn Slobodian's recent book *Globalists*, which examines the internationalist perspective of European economists of the Geneva School, including Friedrich Hayek and the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS), regarded by Slobodian and others as one of the founding institutions of neoliberalism. Slobodian argues that neoliberalism has been less about "free trade" or "market fundamentalism" than about a search for international institutions to protect private capital and regulate trade after decolonization. Think GATT and WTO. Neoliberalism began not in the Reagan-Thatcher era, argues Slobodian, but rather earlier in the wake of European imperialism's collapse after World War I, as economists sought to reconstruct a worldwide capitalist economy in the face of rising democracy and decolonization.<sup>21</sup> I will be drawing on Slobodian's earlier timeline to argue that liberal internationalism, sometimes called "Wilsonianism," can be seen as a crucial step toward the sort of international institutions that post-World War II European neoliberals were calling for. With its promises of democracy and self-determination of nations, Wilsonianism was a powerful idea that put in motion exactly the democratic chaos that Hayek and other so-called neoliberals feared. But Wilsonians also advocated for capitalism, free trade, and, most of all, international institutions, all components of neoliberals' globalist vision. Inspired by Wilson, liberal internationalists of many nationalities helped create the international institutions and agreements that would eventually allow for the freer movement of capital, goods, and services, as well as the protection of capital and property. They did not see themselves as conservative, but rather as peacemakers and idealists.<sup>22</sup>

Historians are just beginning to piece together and explain neoliberalism, and this book hopes to contribute to that project. Much of that work

20. Indeed, the literature on neoliberalism emphasizes its racism with regard to underdeveloped nations; see works cited in note 18. One recent book on liberalism that understands neoliberalism as cosmopolitan and liberal is Fawcett, *Liberalism*, 17–17, 276–78.

21. Slobodian, *Globalists*.

22. See Mazower, *Governing the World*, chaps. 5–7, 10. For a definition of liberal internationalism, see Anthony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). Neither Mazower nor Smith would equate liberal internationalism with neoliberalism, which is still regarded as pejorative.

has been done at the theoretical and transnational level; I attempt here to understand how the globalizing impulse of neoliberalism played out historically in twentieth-century US politics—or more specifically, how liberal internationalist ideas that were promoted by Democrats and antithetical to traditional US political conservatism came to be espoused by the Republican Party. This is especially relevant now, as the current head of the Republican Party seems to be undoing the work of neoliberals and liberal internationalists alike. NAM's history helps explain the bipartisan support for economic internationalism, freer trade, and what would later be called neoliberalism, even before the Cold War and Reagan, and even as voters (and Congress) remained extremely divided about these issues.

### **What to Expect**

This is the first complete history of NAM, from its birth in 1895, through manufacturing's heyday in the mid-twentieth century, to deindustrialization and its survival in our present post-industrial age. All histories are stories, and like all authors, historians are forced to make choices. In making these choices, I have tried to balance detail and readability, depth and breadth, and competing perspectives, both those outside NAM and those within it. It is by no means a comprehensive history of all of NAM's policy positions or political activities, but it captures a story about manufacturing's role in the development of twentieth-century capitalism at home and abroad.

I focus on the themes and argument outlined in this introduction, tracing their development over time while also emphasizing colorful personalities and unexpected contradictions. Highlights of the story I tell include NAM's support for trade with the Soviet Union and other communist countries; congressional investigations and changing lobbying laws; a history of tariff legislation and protectionism; women in industry and NAM; the evolution of the Export-Import Bank and other government subsidies; NAM's membership quandaries; and a new interpretation of NAM in the Reagan Era. Based mainly on materials from the NAM archives, the book also draws on congressional hearings, newspaper accounts, trade journals, and a wide array of secondary sources.

I have organized the story chronologically according to three overlapping phases of industrial manufacturing since the 1890s. The first phase is the ascent and reorganization of industrial manufacturing from the 1890s to 1940. The second phase, from 1941 to 1980, marked manufacturing's dominance in US society and the world as the United States lowered tariffs and



## 16 INTRODUCTION

pursued freer trade. Manufacturing's share of the GDP peaked in 1953, when it represented 25.8 percent of domestic production. Despite its economic centrality well into the 1980s, US manufacturing began to decline in the 1960s; the third phase, from 1960 to 2004, featured deindustrialization, globalization, and the disintegration of the large multidivisional corporation in the 1990s. This process resulted in a new sleek, high-tech, down-sized manufacturing sector, integrated into global supply chains and more productive than ever before.

Manufacturing is still a substantial part of the US economy, holding steady at 11 to 12 percent of GDP. Indeed, the United States, after China, is still the leading producer of manufactured goods.<sup>23</sup> But the industrial capitalism that NAM helped shape and rationalize in the twentieth century is no longer the coin of the realm. It has been replaced by what Gerald Davis has called "shareholder capitalism," which is organized around tech-enhanced finance markets rather than a manufactured-goods market.<sup>24</sup> Thus, manufacturers (and NAM) no longer occupy the uppermost echelons of power. That role has been assumed by the heads of the finance sector and the tech industries, whose goods are of indeterminate materiality and international origin. Nor, of course, is manufacturing a major employer. After a century of fighting unions, NAM only really "won" when US manufacturers shut down their large multidivisional plants. Unions' demise went hand in hand with manufacturers' own diminished political significance and the passing of the industrial capitalism that NAM had done so much to nurture and shape.

Were NAM's leaders simply short-sighted individuals who destroyed the sector they were supposed to advance? Or were they an economic class struggling to stay ahead of changes they had little control over? Did they get what they wanted? Or did they miscalculate? Did short-term profits for some manufacturers consign others to failure and obsolescence? In raising these questions, this book aims to capture how NAM's leaders were both actors in and entangled by history.

23. Martin Neil Baily and Barry Bosworth, "US Manufacturing: Understanding Its Past and Potential Future," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 2–26.

24. See Davis, *Managed by the Markets*, chaps. 2–3; Hyman, *Debtor Nation*; and Nicholas Lemann, *Transaction Man: The Rise of the Deal and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

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