

1. *The Individual and Society*

"All the people like us are we, and everyone else is they."

RUDYARD KIPLING

OVERVIEW

We begin to learn our culture—the ways of our society—just after birth. That process is called socialization and it involves far more than schooling. It affects our values, what we consider right and wrong. Our religious beliefs are therefore an integral part of our culture. So is our racial or ethnic heritage. Our culture also shapes the way we work and play. And it makes a difference to the way we view ourselves and others. Psychologist Deborah Tannen warns of our tendency to generalize about the things we observe and the people we encounter. "Generalizations, while capturing similarities," she points out, "obscure differences. Everyone is shaped by innumerable influences such as ethnicity, religion, class, race, age, profession, the geographical regions they and their relatives have lived in, and many other group identities—all mingled with individual personality and predilection."¹

The United States is home to hundreds of different groups, each with its own culture and traditions. It would be impossible to study each group's history in depth. But by focusing on the links between particular individuals and society, Chapter 1 reveals a number of universal principles. In doing so, it raises a number of questions:

- How is our identity formed? To what extent are we defined by our talents, tastes, and interests? By our membership in a particular ethnic group? Our religion? By the nation in which we live?
- Are we limited by the groups to which we belong or can we expand our horizons? What opportunities do individuals have in our society to expand their horizons? How does one make the most of those opportunities?
- How do our attitudes and beliefs influence our thinking? How does our thinking affect our actions?
- How can we keep our individuality and still be a part of a group?
- How does our tendency to see *us* as unique but *them* as members of groups affect our behavior as well as our attitudes? Do we welcome or fear *them*? When does fear turn to hate?

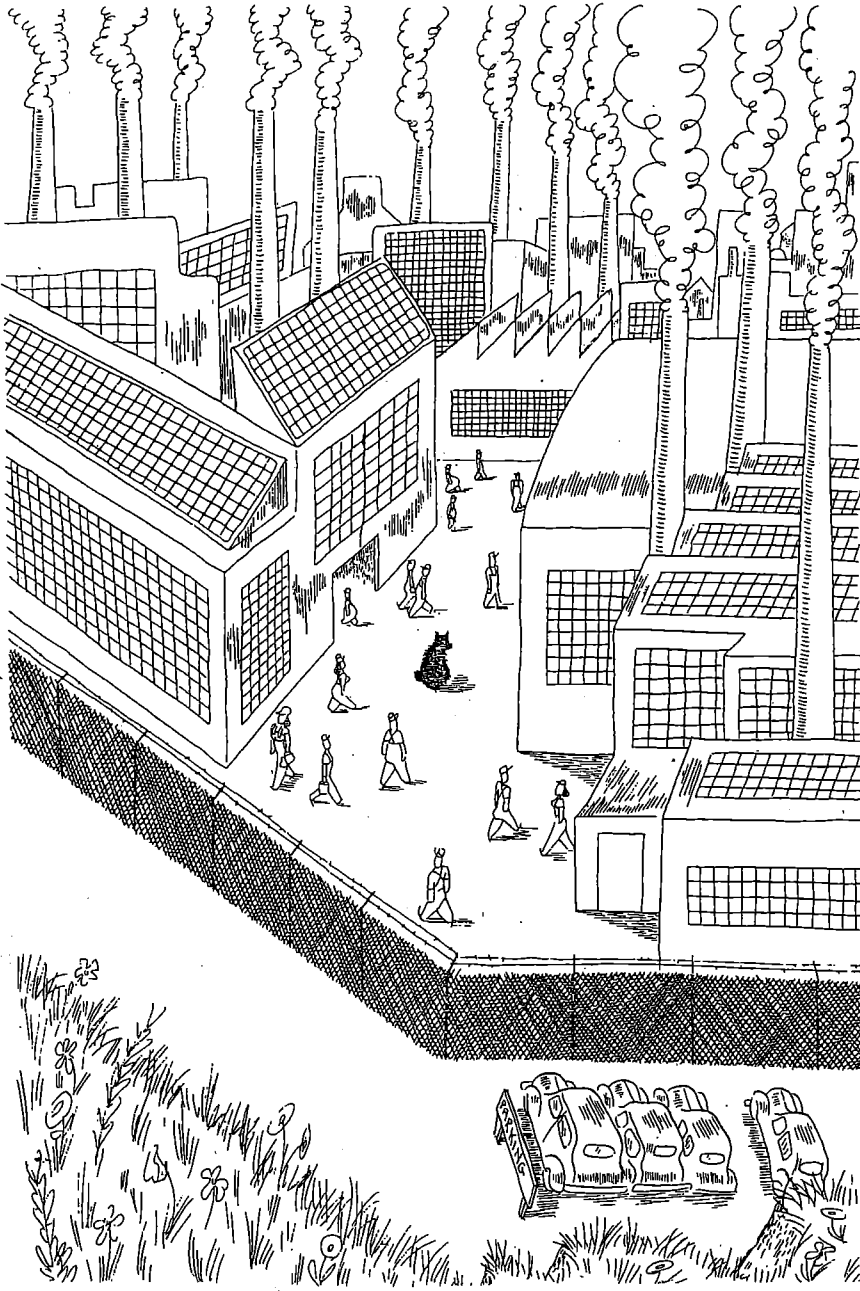
In exploring these and many of the other questions you will encounter in *Facing History and Ourselves*, it is useful to keep a journal. Unlike a finished work, a journal documents the process of thinking. Much like history itself, it always awaits further entries. A journal also allows a writer to witness his or her own history and consider the way ideas grow and change. For author Joan Didion and many others, writing is a way of examining ideas. She explains, "I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means."

A complete lesson plan for using a journal with this course is available from the Facing History Resource Center, as are copies of journals kept by two teachers and their students.

READING 1

The Bear That Wasn't

No two people are exactly alike. Each is an individual with unique talents, interests, and values. At the same time, each also belongs to many different groups. Everywhere, to be human means to live with others. In groups, we meet our most basic needs. In groups, we learn a language, customs, and values. We also satisfy our yearning to belong, receive comfort in times of trouble, and find companions who share our dreams and beliefs. Even as we struggle to define our unique identity, those groups attach labels to us that may differ from those we would choose for ourselves. In the book, *the bear that wasn't*, Frank Tashlin uses words and pictures to describe that process.



the bear that wasn't introduces themes and concepts central not only to this chapter but also to subsequent chapters. The reading is abridged from a children's book with many more illustrations. Multiple copies of the book are available in English and French from the Facing History Resource Center.

Once upon a time, in fact it was on a Tuesday, the Bear saw that it was time to go into a cave and hibernate. And that was just what he did. Not long afterward, in fact it was on a Wednesday, lots of workers arrived near that cave. While the Bear slept, they built a great, huge factory.

As winter turned to spring, the Bear awoke and stepped out of his cave. His eyes popped.

Where was the forest?

Where was the grass?

Where were the trees?

Where were the flowers?

WHAT HAD HAPPENED?

"I must be dreaming," he said. "Of course, I'm dreaming." But it wasn't a dream. It was real. Just then the Foreman came out of the factory. "Hey, you get back to work," he said.

The Bear replied, "I don't work here. I'm a Bear."

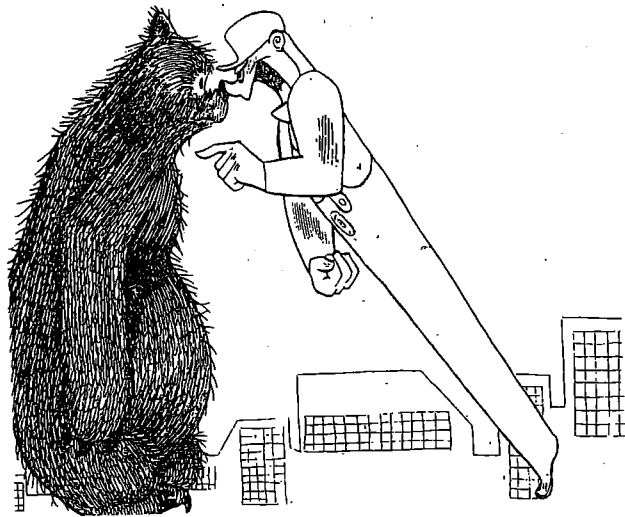
The Foreman laughed, "That's a fine excuse for a man to keep from doing any work. Saying he's a Bear."

The Bear said, "But, I am a Bear."

The Foreman stopped laughing. He was very mad.

"Don't try to fool me," he said. "You're not a Bear. You're a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat. I'm going to take you to the *General Manager*."

The General Manager also insisted the Bear was a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat.



The Bear said, "No, you're mistaken. I am a Bear."

The General Manager was very mad, too.

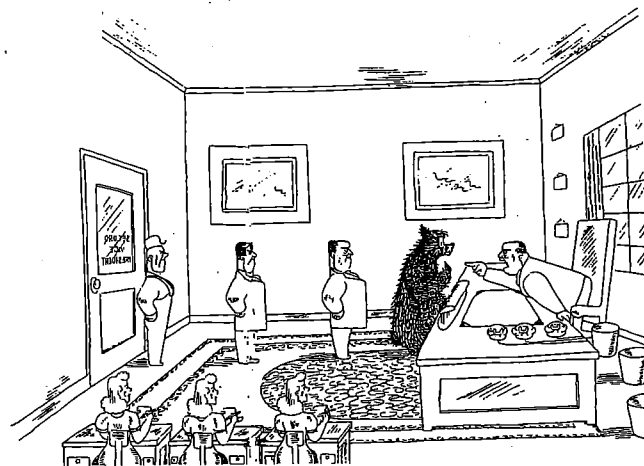
The Bear said, "I'm sorry to hear you say that. You see, I am a Bear."



The Third Vice President was even madder.



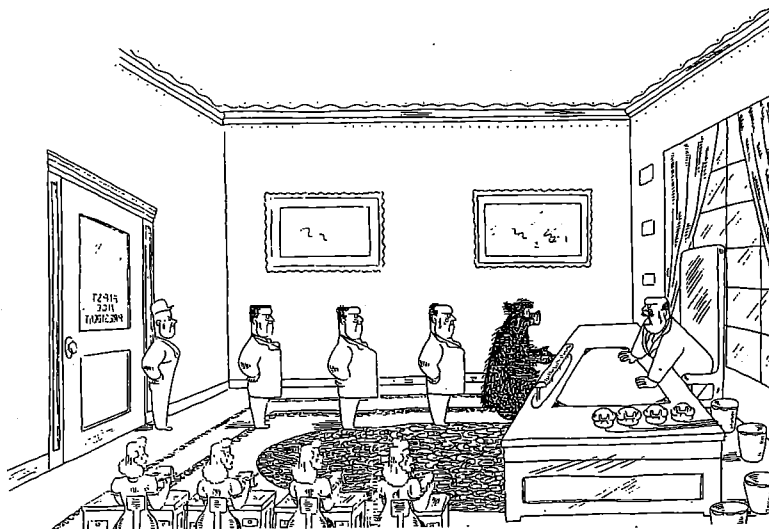
The Second Vice President was more than mad or madder. He was furious.

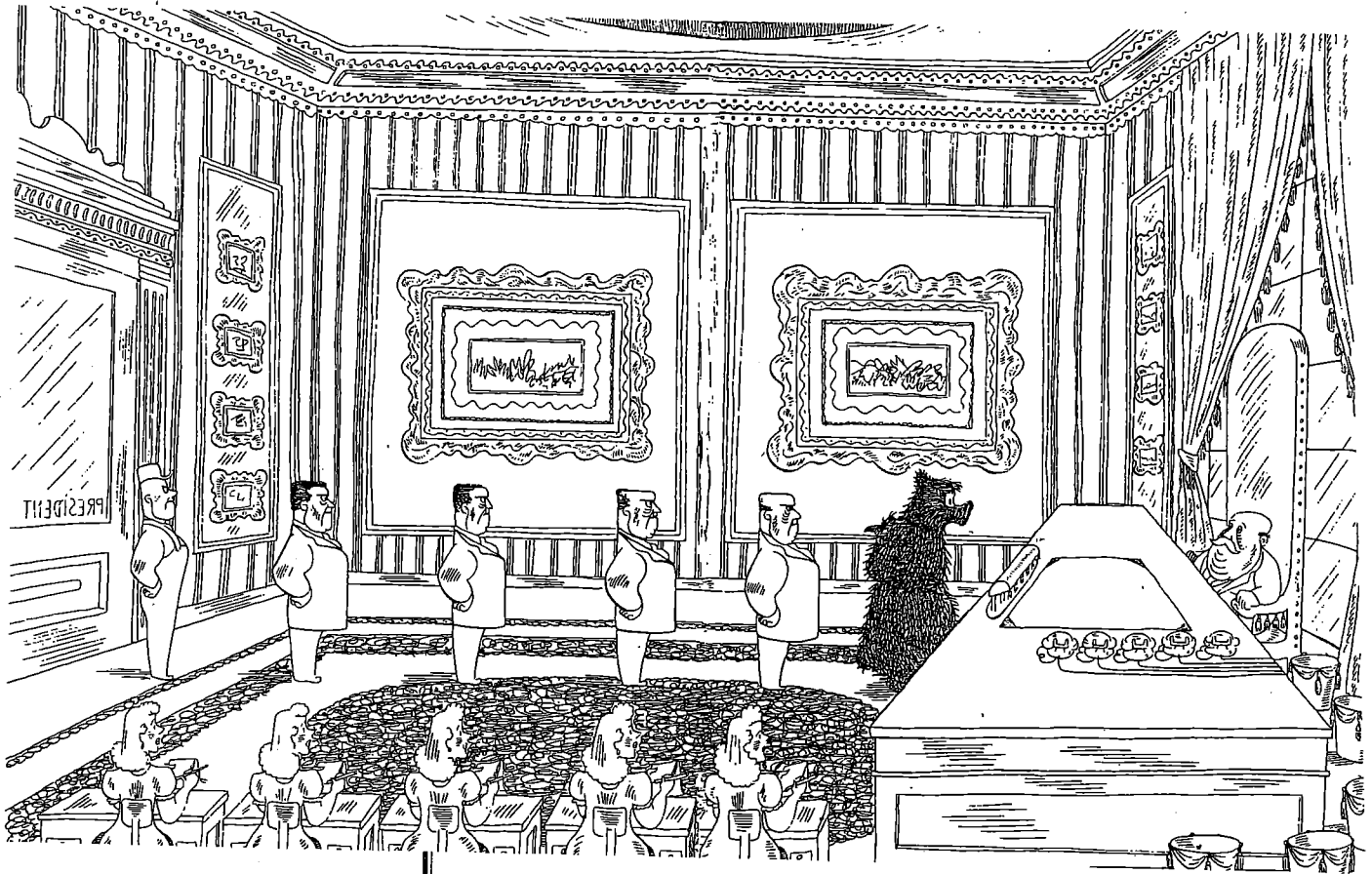


The First Vice President yelled in rage.

He said, "You're not a Bear. You're a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat. I'm going to take you to the *President*."

The Bear pleaded, "This is a dreadful error, you know, because ever since I can remember, I've always been a Bear."





And that is exactly what the Bear told the President.

"Thank you for telling me," the President said. "You can't be a Bear. Bears are only in a zoo or a circus. They're never inside a factory and that's where you are; inside a factory. So how can you be a Bear?"

The Bear said, "But I am a Bear."

The President said, "Not only are you a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat, but you are also very stubborn. So I'm going to prove it to you, once and for all, that you are *not* a Bear."

The Bear said, "But I *am* a Bear."

The President packed his vice presidents and the Bear into a car and drove to the zoo. The Bears in the zoo said the Bear was not a Bear, because if he were a Bear, he would be inside a cage.

The Bear said, "But I am a Bear."

So they all left the zoo and drove to the nearest circus.

"Is he a Bear?" the President asked the circus Bears.

The Bears said no. If he were a Bear he would be wearing a little hat with a striped ribbon holding onto a balloon and riding a bicycle.

The Bear said, "But I am a Bear."

When the President and his vice presidents returned to the factory, they put the Bear to work on a big machine with a lot of other men. The Bear worked on the big machine for many, many months.

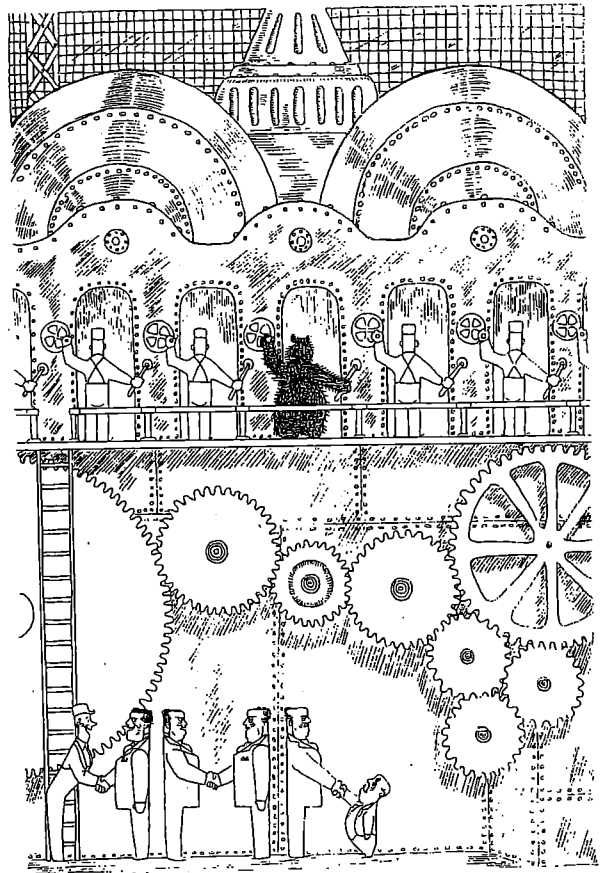
After a long, long time, the factory closed and all the workers went away. The Bear was the last one left. As he left the shut-down factory, he saw geese flying south and the leaves falling from the trees. Winter was coming, he thought. It was time to hibernate.

He found a cave and was about to enter when he stopped. "I can't go in a cave. I'm NOT a Bear. I'm a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat."

As the days grew colder and the snow fell, the Bear sat shivering with cold. "I wish I were a Bear," he thought.

Then suddenly he got up and walked through the deep snow toward the cave. Inside it was cozy and snug. The icy wind and cold, cold snow couldn't reach him here. He felt warm all over.

He sank down on a bed of pine boughs and soon he was happily asleep and dreaming sweet dreams, just like all bears do, when they hibernate. So even though the



FOREMAN
and the
GENERAL MANAGER
and the
THIRD VICE PRESIDENT
and the
SECOND VICE PRESIDENT
and the
FIRST
VICE PRESIDENT
and the
PRESIDENT
and the
ZOO BEARS
and the
CIRCUS BEARS

had said, he was a silly man who needed a shave and wore a fur coat, I don't think he really believed it. Do you? No indeed, he knew he wasn't a silly man, and he wasn't a silly Bear either.²



Sigmund Freud once posed a fateful question for humankind: To what extent can culture overcome the violence caused by the human instincts of aggression and self-destruction? Is there a human instinct of aggression? What insights does *After the First* provide?