

## **State of the union**

**All four of the narratives I've described emerged from America's failure to sustain and enlarge the middle-class democracy of the postwar years.**

**They all respond to real problems. Each offers a value that the others need and lacks ones that the others have.**

**Free America celebrates the energy of the unencumbered individual. Smart America respects intelligence and welcomes change.**

**Real America commits itself to a place and has a sense of limits. Just America demands a confrontation with what the others want to avoid.**

**...  
They all anoint winners and losers.**

**...  
I don't much want to live in the republic of any of them.**

**George Packer, *The Atlantic*, July/August 2021**