Introduction

America was set apart in a special way . . .
It was put here between the oceans
To be found by a certain kind of people . . .
A beacon of hope to the rest of the world.

Ronald Reagan
"A Time for Choosing," 1964

AMERICANS HAVE AN ASTONISHING appetite for life. As the nation of bold ideas, big cars, fast food, sky-thrusting cities, and unparalleled military power, America is a monument to the ambition and industry of its people. In the brief span of a few generations the citizens of the United States have created a culture of unprecedented affluence. The Pharaohs were wealthy, as were many citizens of Rome, but neither empire achieved the broad distribution of riches and the seductive prosperity that exist in America today. In fact, the material wealth and the abundant choice available in contemporary U.S. society are unique in human experience. Never before in the history of our species have so many enjoyed so much.
This extraordinary accomplishment has brought America to the leading edge of an unusual human experiment. Building on a philosophical foundation of unbridled self-interest and commercial freedom, and supercharged now by a revolution in information technology, we have built a dynamic society of tantalizing appeal. But the resulting mix of technology, affluence, and competitive social challenge that we have created for ourselves is radically different from the natural "Nodd in which our species rose to dominance some two hundred thousand years ago. That radical difference in social habitat has fostered a craving and an acquisitive behavior in America that are now testing the limits of our ancestral biology—in mind and in body—and eroding the foundations of our community. In short, in our compulsive drive for more, we are making ourselves sick. How through knowledge of the brain sciences we may better understand our acquisitive craving and its impact on the health and happiness of individual citizens, why such an addictive environment should have emerged first in America, and why in seeking a balanced civil society we must revisit the economic principles that now shape the material focus of our yearning are the subjects of this book.

To want more is a basic human instinct, one that has been essential to our survival. It was our hunger for better things, and the intelligence to imagine them, that gave us mastery over the dangerous and depriving environment in which we evolved, and it was that same hunger that first propelled us forward in the search for a promised land. Having achieved something akin to El Dorado in contemporary American society, however, we now find ourselves in the confusing position of falling victim to our own acquisitive ambition.

This confusion became painfully obvious during the economic boom of the late 1990s, when our appetite for riches and material comfort triggered a competitive frenzy of greed and shortsighted speculation. In the words of George Carlin, the comedian and satirist, America became a land of puzzling contradictions, a nation of "bigger houses but smaller families; more conveniences but less time; wider freeways but narrower
viewpoints: taller buildings but shorter tempers; more knowledge but less judgment." In our relentless search for material wealth, Carlin suggests, Americans have embraced a culture where steep profits and shallow relationships have multiplied our possessions but reduced our social values.

My natural inclination is to dismiss such polemical ramblings, but Carlin’s caricature of contemporary American life contains some disturbing truths. For the majority of Americans the nation’s dramatic increase in material wealth has not been translated into a subjective sense of enhanced well-being. The evidence for such disenchment is pervasive and readily available. From the character of the struggles that my patients report; from the subject matter of newspaper and magazine articles; from talk shows and the concerns expressed during chance conversations with strangers; and from discussions with colleagues, friends, and family, it is clear to me that many Americans are experiencing a discomfit for which they have little explanation. For a year or so after 9/11, the threat of random terror gave cruel focus to America’s troubled state of mind, but alone those events and the military actions that followed offer no lasting explanation for our deepening discomfort. Indeed, it is evident that our uneasiness as a nation was already percolating when the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were struck. A variety of surveys conducted during the 1980s and 1990s recorded a declining satisfaction with life in America. Why, for example, does nearly one-third of the U.S. population now struggle with the complications of obesity? And why, amid our drive for wealth and self-improvement, are the best-selling drugs on the American market those prescribed for the stress-related diseases of ulcer, depression, and high blood pressure? In our demand-driven, debt-saturated culture many families find themselves too pressured to enjoy, even to notice, their affluence. Time is chronically in short supply and the "free moments" that once balanced a busy life have all but disappeared. The demands of securing and maintaining material wealth in a rapidly shifting economic climate—particularly for Americans who shoulder considerable debt—have created an accelerated, competitive lifestyle that steals away sleep and kindles anxiety, threaten-
ing the intimate social webs that sustain family and community. For many Americans the hallowed search for happiness has been hijacked by a discomforting and frenzied activity.

As a practicing psychiatrist I find much in this frenetic chase that is reminiscent of mania, a dysfunctional state of mind that begins with a joyous sense of excitement and high productivity but escalates into reckless pursuit, irritability, and confusion, before cycling down into depression. In the continuum of human emotion, mania is the close cousin and polar opposite of depression. Whereas in profound depression, energy and positive thinking shrink and contract, in mania they accelerate and expand, magnifying and caricaturing the normal experience of happiness through a distorting aggrandizement of the self. Thus, in psychiatric parlance, mania is the **dysphoric** state of activity—from the Greek *dusphoria* meaning “discomfort”—that begins with happiness but lies beyond it in a tumult of anxiety, competition, and social disruption. By analogy, one can look on America’s increasing frenzy as evidence of a nation stumbling into something akin to this dysphoric state. Unwittingly, in our relentless pursuit of happiness we have overshot the target and spawned a manic society with an insatiable appetite for more. America’s dream of a Utopian social order—fueled from the beginning by the twin beliefs that material success equates with personal satisfaction (a notion that is embellished now by a commercially contrived illusion of infinite opportunity) and that technical advance is the key to social progress—has become mired in a confusing mix of manic desire and depressive discomfort.

There are those who will quickly dismiss my analogy to the illness of manic depression, protesting that I misinterpret in my examination of America’s malaise the aggressive pursuit required to further the nation’s commercial self-interest. After all, as the world’s leading trader—at a time when globalization is proceeding apace—is it not appropriate that America is in the vanguard of the race for market domination? And is it not inevitable that when locked in such vital international competition, there will be winners and losers at home? The frenzied discomfort that many Americans are now experiencing merely reflects a time-limited period of adjustment. As the economy achieves a new balance, so too will many find a new social balance.

Unfortunately, in the short term the increasing discomfort happening to them is real. There is no presumption that the economy alone has already been transformed. The economy alone does not explain the growing anxiety. There is also a growing everyday life in our lives—a personal story of one—of the way the world feels as we all live our lives. As I explore in the next few chapters—and in the following personal stories—there is a growing feeling that there are important points of neurobiological, psychological, and social anxiety that are not being dealt with.

Let me elaborate. In our society today, there are destructive behavior forces, only some of which are related to the rising cost of living, and only some of which are related to the price of living, and only some of which are related to the price of housing. Our society today is characterized by a collective insanity that has become an epidemic. The human brain
period of adjustment, the predictable response to an evolving economic challenge. As the market forces of globalization play out, America will find a new social balance, the dysphoria will subside, and all will be well.

Unfortunately, while appealing in its simplicity, such an analysis falls short when it comes to helping individual Americans understand what is happening to them. As I will describe (and about which many books have already been written), globalization and changing economic conditions are an essential part of the conundrum that is America’s mania. But the economy alone is not a sufficient explanation for the sea change that many Americans are now forced to navigate; nor is it one for the obesity, the growing anxiety, and the corporate greed (each a topic about which there is also a growing literature) that increasingly plague the conduct of everyday life in our nation. No, what you will discover in subsequent chapters—as I explore the lives of individual Americans through their personal stories and reference them back to what we know about human behavior and how the brain works—is that these seemingly distinct manifestations of ill health are parts of a larger sickness. From the vantage point of neurobiology, given the daring temperament of the American people and the conditions in which we now find ourselves, the damaging frenzy that now engulfs our nation was predictable and is treatable.

Let me elaborate. In practicing psychiatry one learns early that self-destructive behaviors are commonly the result of conflict among opposing forces, only some of which are within conscious awareness. Usually these forces are deeply rooted in both biology and experience, and finding an effective remedy for the dysfunctional behavior, it is essential both to identify those roots and to respect them. And that is how I will proceed in my exploration of America’s mania. To solve the puzzle and to accurately diagnose the frenzy that now grips America—and, most importantly, to diminish its corrosive impact—we must look beneath the singular explanation of a changing economy. We must seek to understand the roots of the growing conflict that exists in American culture between our instinctual striving for more and the reward system of the affluent society that we have built for ourselves.

The human brain, the organ that acts as the transducer in interpret-
ing daily experience and the lens through which we view the world, was programmed long ago to keep us safe from harm. Thus, by nature, humans are curiosity-driven, reward-seeking, and harm-avoiding creatures. Having evolved in circumstances of danger and privation, these instincts of self-preservation remain the vital force behind much of our behavior. These ancient drives motivate us to get out of bed each morning and to tackle the challenges of the day. And, contrary to what we would like to believe about ourselves, each day our astonishing intelligence functions largely as servant to this passionate self-interest.

The countervailing force to this self-indulgence, which is weak by comparison and depends on social learning, draws its strength from our deep attachment to others. Our intelligence aids here too. Skilled in complex communication, we are intensely social creatures and find comfort in living together in stable social hierarchies. Loyal to those we love and in whom we trust, and aggressive and punitive toward those who may threaten us, we learn quickly from personal experience and from others.

Hence, in simple terms, it is the dynamic tension between innate desire and social learning that determines individual behavior and underpins the extraordinary complexity of the myths and social agreements that we call human culture. And because of this tension we rarely exercise the basic instincts of self-preservation as solitary animals but rather do so in competitive collaboration with others. The give-and-take of a market economy may be understood within such a conceptual framework as a natural by-product of human social evolution, one where competitive collaboration is exploited as a collective benefit. Thus, with the adoption of a few rules—such as honesty in competition, respect for private property, and the ability to exchange goods for money—a market culture is essentially an ordering of human instinct and competition by those traditional cooperative, sharing practices that our forebears found to be fruitful and successful. Through the give-and-take of social interaction, and through the internalization of the conventions and customs it promotes, instinctual self-interest is liberated and molded to the common good. The capitalist enterprise is founded on this dynamic premise.
Such was the insight of Adam Smith—the Scottish philosopher and the patron saint of American capitalism—who in the latter part of the eighteenth century and during the nascent days of the American Republic championed the social value of harnessing the instinctual drives of curiosity and self-interest within the framework of the marketplace to create a self-regulating economic order. The Founding Fathers, in their eager quest for commercial independence, took Smith's vision seriously, and in America today we still prefer to satisfy the nation's social and economic needs through market mechanisms. But in recent decades we have placed Adam Smith's original texts aside, as we have done with many patron saints. That is unfortunate, for as I will detail in later pages, Smith's economic philosophy was predicated on a dynamic balance between commercial liberty and a set of social structures that are rapidly eroding in America. Smith worried in his writings, as did many other thinkers of the time, that human envy and our tendency toward compulsive craving, if left unchecked, would destroy the empathic feeling and neighborly concerns that are essential to his economic model and a free market's successful operation. In searching for the necessary counterbalance to this natural human avarice, Smith took comfort in the fellowship and social constraint that he considered inherent in the tightly knit communities characteristic of the eighteenth century.

Given the social conditions that prevailed during his lifetime, Adam Smith was prescient in his judgment. Experience tells us that small markets do produce their own constraint and rational order, founded as they are on an interlocking system of self-interested exchange. However, Smith lived before the invention of the megacorporation, before instant communication with a global reach, and before the double cheeseburger and stock options. In America, living with such an abundance of choice, we have discovered some disturbing facts about human behavior—facts that from knowledge of modern neurobiology are predictable and that confirm Smith's worst fears. In times of material affluence, when desire is no longer constrained by limited resources, the evidence from our contemporary American experiment suggests that we humans have trouble setting limits to our instinctual craving. This comes as little surprise
to the behavioral neuroscientist, for it is now well established that under certain contingencies it is possible to "overload" the reward circuits of the brain, triggering craving and insatiable desire. As the quintessential reward-driven culture, America bears witness to this truth, for there is considerable evidence suggesting that unchecked consumption fosters our social malaise, eroding self-restraint and pulling the cultural pendulum toward excessive indulgence and greed.

Compounding this erosion of self-restraint is an increasing globalization, consolidating the commercial power of a few megacorporations of international reach. In such organizations the traditional checks and balances of the marketplace are removed from the communities they serve, threatening the wellspring of the social mores—neighborliness and empathy—that Adam Smith in his economic theory had relied on as the major bridle for our instinctual passions. Another consequence of the increasing consolidation of commerce and the destruction of small community-based markets is that the distribution of wealth in America is becoming badly skewed. This trend, and it shows little sign of abating, fosters the envy, the debt accumulation, and the demand-driven work environments that fuel the discomforting frenzy experienced by many American families. The result—again predictable from knowledge of the dynamics of human behavior—is that the delicate balance between individual desire and social responsibility—the bedrock of a healthy society—is increasingly threatened.

But why has this potentially damaging cultural climate—a malignant social mania that fosters envy over empathy—emerged first in America, among the many wealthy nations in the world? Key to fitting this particular piece of the puzzle into the whole is an understanding of the American temperament—the roots of which are to be found in the immigrant history of the United States—and how America's laissez-faire commercial culture is uniquely driven by the migrant mind-set.

America is an unusual nation—it is in many ways a genetic experiment as much as it is a social one—in that the temperament of the migrant has played a unique role. Most Americans, or the forebears of most Americans within a generation or two, came to this country because
they chose to do so. For three centuries and longer, America has been a lure for those of the migrant disposition, "a certain kind of people" for whom a love of competition, curiosity, and a willingness to take risks are instinctual and enduring talents. Migrants are by temperament restless and ingenious and the United States represents the largest single collection of such individuals in the world today.

The aggressive migrant temperament has always been a feature of American life. Alexis de Tocqueville, that astute eyewitness of American habits and culture, observed as much when he visited in 1831. The Americans, he wrote in Democracy in America, approach life "like a game of chance . . . or the day of a battle." Although Tocqueville had in mind the first generations of European immigrants who then populated the states of the eastern seaboard, his observations serve equally well to explain the competitive success of the diverse peoples who subsequently migrated to the Union's fifty states. In California, where I live amid the restless energy and ethnic diversity of Los Angeles, it is plain to see that America is held together not by race, color, or creed but by the migrant's burning ambition and the ancient skills essential to human survival. Migrants approach life with extraordinary resolve: self-selected in their search for betterment and shaped further by the challenge of their journey, the migrant's principal goal is one of individual achievement.

The migrant's heightened ambition and love of competition serve to reinforce the self-interest that is so essential to success in a free-market society. This is the second important piece in the puzzle of understanding our American mania. It also helps explain the dominance of the market ideology in American culture and why we have become such a successful commercial nation. The competitive ambitions of the migrant have found unusual opportunity in America's embrace of laissez-faire commerce and in the vast natural resources of the North American continent. Whereas much of the cultural cohesion of Europe is drawn from a communal sense of place and history, America's national identity is held together by dreams of individual freedom, property, and material betterment. Successive immigrant waves have infused America with
new energy and fresh ideas, and with this commercial advantage the nation is now undisputed as the world’s economic leader.

Perhaps the key piece in solving our puzzle, however, and the immediate stimulus to America’s increasing frenzy, is the advent of the information age. Only with that revolution, and with the dramatic changes that it has spawned in America’s social and economic environment, did our manic predisposition come to full flower. Previously the marketplace has always had its natural constraints. For the first two centuries of the nation’s existence, even the most insatiable American citizen was significantly leashed by the checks and balances inherent in a closely knit community, by geography, by the elements of weather, or, in some cases, by religious practice. Then toward the end of the twentieth century, two important events revolutionized capital markets across the world. The Soviet Union collapsed—and with it the competing economic philosophy of communism—leaving capitalism supreme. And almost simultaneously an information technology capable of leaping the barriers of time and space became broadly available. Operating in a world of instant communication with minimal social tethers, America’s engines of commerce and desire became turbocharged. The constraints of time and space that have dictated the fundamental rhythms of human existence throughout our evolution—the great oceans, the mountains, and the planetary cycles of light and dark—were no longer significant impediments to America’s commercial enterprise. With the coming of the information age, the restless migrant spirit of America was unleashed on a new global frontier, and in the excitement of that moment our mania blossomed.

Americans have fallen back from the pinnacle of manic activity that characterized the late 1990s, and in the period of depressive rumination that inevitably follows, we have begun to survey as a nation the personal and social damage wrought by our excess. But the reality remains. We have invented a new demand-driven environment for ourselves—a “Fast New World”—where data, money, and ideas circle the globe with dizzying dispatch. Globalization now offers American business a commercial environment without limits, one where entrepreneurs of manic predis-
position may work around the clock. Vast stores of information are now available at the touch of a button. With the nomadic tools of telephone and laptop we have immediate access to friends, family, business associates, news, personal banking services, stock trading, and navigational aids regardless of where we happen to be—and so, too, do others have immediate access to us.

It is the resonance between this accelerated social and economic environment and the competitive, workaholic ways of the migrant temperament that now spurs America's manic pursuit. But this resonance alone does not explain the growing personal discomfort felt by many Americans. There is another vital element to be considered—and it is one easily forgotten, given that as humans we prefer to think of ourselves above the animal herd. While we are fascinated by the novelties of the Fast New World, as evolved creatures of our planet we are physiologically ill equipped for the turbocharged lifestyle that they promote. Simply put, the strain of unbridled manic pursuit, whether we enjoy it or not, is damaging to both health and happiness.

For many Americans the sense of exhilaration and the reward-laden opportunities afforded by the manic society are compelling, indeed even habit forming. But for those mentally unprepared or unwilling to impose personal constraint, there are dangers in such a demand-driven, helter-skelter existence. As any individual who has suffered mania knows, despite the seductive quality of the initial phases of the condition, life at the manic edge is impossible to sustain in any coherent fashion. So it is, by analogy, when one revels in the affluence and immediacy of the Fast New World. Initially the excitement of the competition and the lure of the potential payoff are so energizing that concerns about health are forgotten or swept aside. But such denial ignores that our instincts are those of an ancient brain that evolved over many thousands of years, and that the human body is tuned for optimum function under conditions radically different from those that we enjoy in America today. Hence, our ingenuity in creating novel environments—such as the competitive opportunities of a global commerce that never sleeps, or an infinite supply of high-calorie food—rather than enhancing well-being may actually
disrupt the ancient mechanisms that sustain our physical and mental balance. Such is the potential danger of the social and economic environment developing in America today.

The individual of migrant temperament, quick witted and vigilant, is particularly well equipped to deal with the challenge and physical risk of frontier life. Thus it is an odd twist of fate that the same curiosity, hard work, and intelligence that first enabled the migrant to shape these United States have now invented a lifestyle that can be physiologically and mentally disabling. Inadvertently, through the choices we have made, we have created an imbalance—a mismatch—between the demands of our time-sensitive commercial culture and the biology that we have inherited. Indeed, the anxiety and much of the ill health from which Americans now suffer can be traced to the strain of this growing cultural-biological mismatch. Predictably, by the way in which we have chosen to conduct our lives, we are making ourselves sick.

So what is to be done? States of health and illness reflect a complex interaction between the individual and the social and environmental circumstances under which that individual must live. When the interaction proceeds in relative harmony, health is sustained, and when the balance is lost, the result is illness. Only in considering both sides of the equation—the role of individual behavior and the demands of the environment—can the potential outcome of the interaction be clearly understood. We accept that tobacco smoke in the air that we breathe, for example, or chemicals in the water that we drink can be toxic to individual health, and we adapt our behaviors and social laws accordingly. But we have difficulty employing a similar logic when evaluating the food we eat or the social distribution of economic wealth, both of which are important determinants of health and happiness. For most individuals living in postindustrial, information-driven societies—of which the United States is the exemplar—the stress of daily life is now tied not to physical toxins but to the toxic demand of a world that never sleeps, and to how we think and feel about our material circumstances. Today it is no longer the threat of physical harm but the uncertainty of an unpredictable workplace, the loss of intimacy associated with an unstable marriage, or a perception of discomfort, with the frenzy of America determined by the balance decides health and sickness.

If as Americans we choose to lead this lifestyle and to avoid its pitfalls, we live in a culture that is, and to avoid its pitfalls, we live in a culture that is, indeed, relentless beyond our means. The anxiety and much of the ill health from which Americans now suffer can be traced to the strain of this growing cultural-biological mismatch. Predictably, by the way in which we have chosen to conduct our lives, we are making ourselves sick.

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The book is divided into three chapters. In Fact, PROSPERITY, I begin by describing affluence has our envy and migrant politicians who recognize satisfy desire than personal debt. This debt is increasingly difficult to family and helps define the reality of expanding personal priority set. Social balance is shifting, and there is for the family.
marriage, or a perceived change in social status that seeds our smoldering discomfort, with declining harmony and mounting anxiety. In the frenzy of America's affluent society, the individual state of mind determined by the balance we strike between choice and opportunity is what decides health and illness.

If as Americans we are to enjoy the benefits of the Fast New World and to avoid its pitfalls, we must first control the mania that it induces. We live in a culture in which our acquisitive cravings have been promoted beyond our needs, and the demand and strain, which that craving now inflicts on mind and body, are beginning to exceed the flexibility inherent in our biological heritage. Thus do we promote our own sickness. Protection against such a sickness comes through knowledge of the assets and liabilities of our migrant culture and from an understanding of the physiological and behavioral limits imposed on us by our evolutionary past. It is my goal in writing this book to help the reader achieve that understanding and improve self-awareness in these complex times, thus enhancing the conscious life choices that can mitigate the strain of our American mania.

THE BOOK is divided into three approximately equal parts, each with three chapters. In Part I, The American Temperament: A Mania for Prosperity, I begin by describing how America's freedoms and poorly distributed affluence have spawned a competitive consumerism, where in our envy and migrant yearning—aided and abetted by merchants and politicians who recognize that it is more popular and more profitable to satisfy desire than to limit it—we have accumulated a mountain of personal debt. This debt, which in a time of diminished economic activity is increasingly difficult to service, now burdens the average American family and helps drive our treadmill-like existence. In the new cultural reality of expanding commercial dominance in parallel with shrinking personal priority setting, time has become the constraining variable. The social balance is shifting: the more time we spend at work, the less time there is for the family; the more people with whom we interact, the less
attention each of them receives; and the greater the distance that we travel, the thinner is our appreciation of the neighbor who lives next door. As never before, whether we like it or not, commerce has become a relentless intruder into the private life of every American citizen. And in consequence the challenges that beset us each day and the choices that we make are driven largely by the demands of the workplace, to the detriment of family and community.

The compelling attraction of laissez-faire commerce is that it harnesses the competitive human instincts for self-preservation, particularly curiosity and self-reward, and promotes through a division of labor those who are innovative in their adaptation to market forces. This is the truth that Adam Smith recognized in his economic philosophy a century or so before Darwin published his theory of evolution, founded on similar ideas about competition and survival. Hence, after describing the instinctual roots of Smith’s philosophy, I draw together these elements to explain why competition in the marketplace is especially attractive to the survival instincts of the migrant temperament, and how in consequence the migrant’s aggressive striving has shaped the American cultural experiment. Instinctual imperatives continue to have a powerful influence on human behavior. Despite our planetary dominance and sophisticated intelligence, science reminds us that we remain creatures tethered to an ancient past, as will become clear when I explain the bonds we share with our primate cousins. Finally, in concluding the first part of the book, I explore, through the stories and experiences of three Americans who live life at the manic edge, how the culture of the American workplace changed in the closing decades of the twentieth century and how the entrepreneurial spirit that is now central to America’s commercial success is fostered by the reward-driven neurobiology and the love of risk that comprise the migrant temperament.

In Part II, Over the Top: Prosperity’s Paradox, I describe some of the contradictory consequences of our American mania and the challenges to the nation’s physical and moral health that the Fast New World has induced. While for a select few life in America has never been more privileged, many citizens now live in a state of chronic stress. A surfeit of choice and mass sleep and rapid transit demand of an unsatisfactory experience. We dwell moment carries its condition. This moment carries its exhaustion the body disease.

And yet despite debt, desire, or back technologically age preservation that is better tuned physiology, in an unexpected propositions and this blind pursuit: push the boundaries of greed, anxiety.

In the final part considered, I outline our manic craving. From the mixed is our strident domineering. I suggest that in the Enlightenment—that form the facet that have been erosion. It is this “paradigm consumerism and minds with the American world stage. Fear that in its might threaten tater. In fact, with
The manic craving. First, I turn to Europe to explore—and to learn from—the mixed reaction to America’s changing social agenda and to our strident dominance in international commerce and political affairs. I suggest that in the marketing of American culture, the ideals of the Enlightenment—the ideals of individual freedom and unalienable rights that form the foundation of the American system of economic democracy—have been caricatured to mean the “pleasure” of material possession. It is this “pop” culture of self-desire—together with its rampant consumerism and treadmill-like demand—that is now equated in many minds with the American “way of life.” In consequence, not all peoples on the world stage are happy with America’s growing supremacy. Some fear that in its global dominance our market enterprise and military might threaten to overwhelm, perhaps even to extinguish, other cultures. In fact, with globalization we have come full circle to a new mera-
cantilism—to something reminiscent of the commercial hegemony that Adam Smith so stridently opposed, and that drove his philosophy of economic liberty—where multinational corporations control most of the world trade, potentially bending individuals and democracy to their will.

At home America’s mania for more is shifting the vital equilibrium—where the liberties of the individual and community life are balanced to mutual advantage—that promotes human happiness and sustains a civil society. Because of this shift, enabled by a laissez-faire political doctrine, America’s social infrastructure has been inadvertently weakened through a potentially addictive intertwining of self-interest-driven craving that is reinforced by relentless commercial competition for consumer markets. Thus I return to the philosophy of Adam Smith, who believed that it is society that transforms people into moral beings. For Smith social liberty was not freedom from all social control, but rather freedom as an individual to control one’s own passions and to channel that energy toward socially beneficial behavior within a local market structure. While with careful thought and changes in lifestyle—the principles of which I review—the more fortunate among us can accommodate the immediate challenges of America’s Fast New World, in the longer view we must refine and reaffirm Smith’s social vision if we are to curb our individual cravings and nurture the health of our civil society. The established roots of human meaning and the cornerstones of any democracy—freedom, honesty, caring relationships, a belief in the next generation—derive their power from the mutual respect of individuals and from an investment in community at home and abroad. The ancient truth remains. It is through the empathic intimacy of human relationships, not in the accumulation of material goods, that true prosperity is secured.

IN MANY of the human stories that illustrate American Mania I have drawn on my experience and practice as a psychiatrist, and in drawing inference from those stories I have relied heavily on my knowledge as a behavioral neuroscientist. I have also benefited in my analysis from dis-
I have discussed with many colleagues and friends, some of whom are mentioned in these pages. I will introduce you, for example, to Peanut, the New Hampshire fish farmer who through ingenuity and hard work swims against the tide of big business, and to Americans who thrive in the Fast New World and to some who do not: to Marcel, who began his adult life as a competitive athlete, later to find a comfortable balance in the business world; to Tom, who in his success recognized the seeds of his own destruction but regained his balance; to Kim, an immigrant, who despite growing anxiety and briefly losing her balance continues to pursue her dream—and to the many others from whom, in their generosity, I have learned about life at the manic edge.

But the stories I tell are also informed by my own experience as a migrant, for like so many Americans I am of a wandering spirit. Why such a restless soul should have settled on me is unclear. My father's forebears spent several centuries in the English county of Essex, where there are gravestones to prove it, while my mother's family—the Abbotts—lived for generations on London's East Side. Careful inspection of the family archives, however, reveals hints of restlessness. Just after the First World War my father's elder brother disappeared into a logging camp in western Canada. And later, when I was a boy, a maternal uncle's tales of his African adventures enthralled me. But it was in the union of these two families that the taste for the journey truly declared itself. My brother John, to whom this book is dedicated, lives the nomadic existence of an international merchant, while my own professional responsibilities have led me steadily westward to the University of California and to the city of Los Angeles.

Los Angeles—the dream-making capital of the world—serves as the backdrop for a number of the stories I recount. Some readers who cut their teeth in the urban centers of Europe or on the East Coast of America may prefer to dismiss what happens in Los Angeles as from a place apart, the aberrations of a migrant's city within a migrant land. Such sentiments are understandable. Awash in the solar energy of a subtropical paradise, Los Angelinos engage life in the moment. The pace is fast, the music loud, and money is on display. Part of me, too, would prefer to dis-
miss such an existence as a mythmaker's parody. But the place is real. In its immediacy and in its magnification of the familiar, Los Angeles creates its own reality and in so doing offers a "fast-forward" simulation of our collective future as a migrant culture.

As Americans we must now decide whether such a future is of our choice, and whether it is sustainable. In the pages that follow, it is my goal to help inform that choice. Will we learn as a people to constructively channel the opportunities and individual enticements of the Fast New World toward an equitable social order, as Adam Smith had envisioned, or will the material demand for economic growth continue to erode the microcultures and intimate social bonds that are the hallmark of our humanity and the keys to health and personal happiness? Have the goals of America's original social experiment been hijacked by its commercial success, threatening the delicate dance between individual desire and social responsibility, or will the nation in its migrant wisdom effectively apply its market and military dominance to remain a "beacon of hope," enhancing the well-being of all the world's peoples? This is a critical time in America, a time for careful thought and diligent action, for we have discovered in our commercial success that in an open society the real enemy is the self-interest that begins with a healthy appetite for life and mushrooms into manic excess during affluent times. Americans are again in the vanguard of human experience, and the world is watching.

It is again a time for choosing.