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**AMERICAN RELIGIOUS VALUES  
AND THE  
FUTURE OF AMERICA**

edited by  
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Benjamin E. Mays	Rosemary Radford Ruether
Marc H. Tanenbaum	

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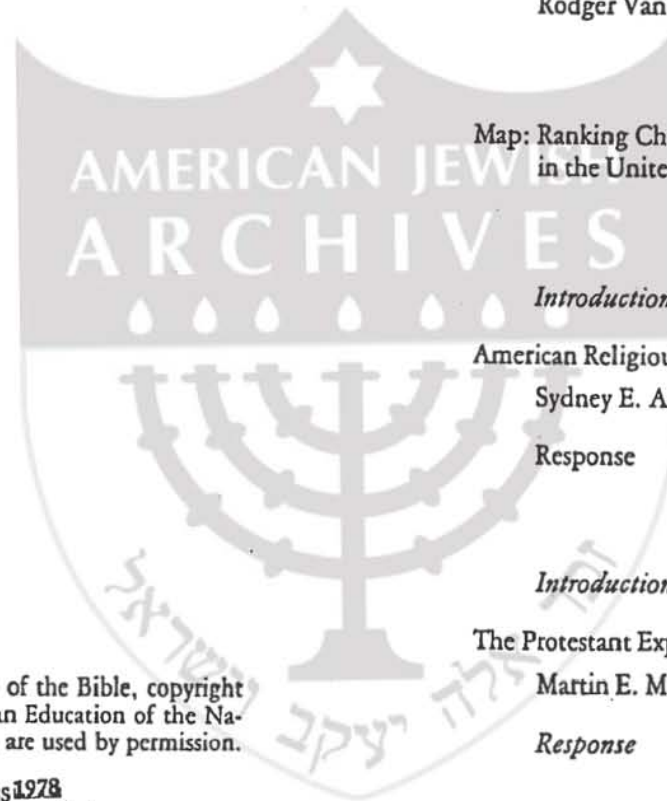
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## Values, Events, and Features in the American Religious Experience

MARC H. TANENBAUM

The observance of the Bicentennial commemorating the American Revolution was in many ways a moral tragedy. Given the magnitude and frightening seriousness of the problems of human survival that our nation and the world community face, the Bicentennial could well have been a singular opportunity for raising the consciousness and mobilizing the moral will of the American people and of world society about the central critical issues of our age, which, at their deepest levels, are moral, spiritual, and universally human issues.

With all the national publicity and consequent expectation that something "meaningful" would emerge from the Bicentennial year, many had hoped that this observance would become an occasion for reflecting seriously and systematically on the values and ideals for which the American Revolution was ostensibly fought, and what relevancy those ideals and values might have to help guide and sustain us in this complex and difficult time—a time of potential nuclear annihilation; of an insane arms race; of vast human suffering through poverty, hunger, and malnutrition; of decline of human liberties and human rights in many parts of the world; of the rape of the environment and the shrinking of nature's resources; of economic inequalities that border on the criminal; of pervasive crime, terrorism, and violence; of moral corruption in

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governments, multinational corporations, business, law, medicine, labor, religious and educational institutions themselves.

Despite the multivolume report prepared by the national American Revolutionary Bicentennial Commission that purported to document "the achievements" of that year-long fiasco, the dominant images left by the Bicentennial observances were those of "Op-Sail," of graceful preindustrial ships sailing languidly and pointlessly up the Hudson River, and of tons of red-white-and-blue junk, that made advertisers and commercial hucksters rich, but neither enriched the spirit nor nourished the understanding of the American people. If one judges by the opinion polls and subsequent political events, the American people (and other peoples elsewhere) are looking for bread, and by and large they were fed circuses. The rare exceptions to these generalizations were some of the programs, seminars, studies, and publications conducted mainly and independently by Christian and Jewish institutions and by some universities, such as Villanova. But these reflective activities reached modest numbers of Americans, and their constructive influences may yet take years before they percolate down into the general culture, which is far more decisively influenced by advertisers and the mass media than by moral philosophers and historians of ideas.

These critical comments are not an effort to achieve any kind of notoriety as a sensationalist Jeremiad. They are based on a reading of polls and studies of the present state of "the American mood," as well as on personal experiences through travel in every part of the United States during 1976, and before and after then.

Thus, a Louis Harris Poll issued on November 18, 1976, reports: "An 88 percent majority of the American people feel the top priority for the next Congress is to 'clean up corruption in government.'" Close behind are the following mandates for Congress and the White House that "sum up the prevailing mood" today:

Listen to the people more	83%
Show trust in the people more	79%
Help the poor, the elderly, and others hard hit by inflation	78%
Begin to represent the consumer more, and big business and big labor less	78%
Make sure no more Watergate affairs can take place	78%
Make government less secret and more open to what is really going on	76%
Have courage to ask people to make sacrifices when necessary	66%



Pass much stricter legislation to protect the environment and to curb air and water pollution	59%
Curb the power excesses of the White House	57%
Pass legislation for a national health program	53%
Reduce imports of oil from foreign sources in the short run	50% <sup>1</sup>

In a later poll issued by Harris on December 24, 1976,<sup>2</sup> Americans were questioned on areas of life including violence, war, unemployment, tension, religion, and discrimination against minorities. The survey showed that 100 percent of the American people wanted to see a decline in violence, but a 67-22 percent of the majority did not believe they will see such a decline in their lifetime. While 98-1 percent majority of Americans want to see an "end to war," 82-8 percent said they did not believe this will happen. In 1968, the "pessimistic majority" was 55-32 percent.

By 97-2 percent, Americans said they would like to see "an end to unemployment," but an 81-11 percent majority was pessimistic that unemployment would be ended. In 1968, 42-39 percent majority did not believe unemployment would end.

"Life without constant tension" was hoped for by a 96-2 percent majority, but expected by only 11 percent. The only area of reform in which the American people are prepared to express much optimism is that of eliminating discrimination against minorities; 90-4 percent majority said they would like to see "equality for blacks," and a 44-42 percent majority indicated they believed it would be achieved.

Such polls as these reflect episodically what many social commentators have been aware of for some time, namely, that America, and postindustrial societies generally, face a "malaise of civilization"—a deep, pervasive crisis in values. Robert Heilbroner, author of *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect*, describes this condition in these words:

There is a feeling that great troubles and changes loom for the future of civilization as we know it. Our age is one of profound turmoil, a time of deep change, and there is a widespread feeling that the world is coming apart at the seams.

We have gone through "a drubbing of history," and a barrage of confidence-shaking events have filled us with a sense of unease and foreboding during the past decade or so. No doubt foremost among these has

been the experience of the Vietnam War, an experience that has undermined every aspect of American life—our belief in our own invincible power, our trust in government, our estimate of our private level of morality.

But the Vietnam War was only one among many such confidence-shaking events. The explosion of violence in street crime, race riots, bombings, bizarre airplane hijackings, shocking assassinations have made a mockery of the TV image of middle class American gentility and brought home with terrible impact the recognition of a barbarism hidden behind the superficial amenities of life.

We switch on the evening TV and learn what's going to hit us next on the head—a hijacking, a murder, a rape, or some other daily terror. These things profoundly affect our outlook.<sup>3</sup>

If the Bicentennial itself did not succeed in clarifying the nature and extent of the "malaise" the majority of the American people continue to feel about the future prospects of American democracy and the American way of life, certainly candidate Jimmy Carter demonstrated that he had nearly "perfect pitch" for the signals of that condition. Two years before the election he was a virtual unknown nationally. On the basis of his constant refrain, "Trust me, I will tell you no lies," he was catapulted into the most powerful office of the greatest superpower on earth. Carter had an unerring insight into the malaise of the American people, and responded to their yearning for a vision of "what is right about America." His advocacy of the cause of human rights in the world, and the broad-based support of that advocacy, is a demonstration of the degree to which Americans wish to recapture some of the ideals and values of the past, and seek to live them in reality today.

But it will take more than a few idealistic slogans haphazardly selected from the American revolutionary quiver to sustain American moral and political will in the face of the foreign and domestic challenges that confront us, both short-term and long-term. In an effort to provide some clarity and depth to an understanding of the distinctive nature of American ideals and values, I will review the sources of American value concepts and will seek to make some connections between those perceived ideals of the "American Experiment" and the contemporary problems we face together.

What are those "distinctive values and ideals" symbolized by the American Revolution; what have been their sources?

3. Robert Heilbroner, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* (New York: Norton, 1974), p. 13.

1. Louis Harris poll, November 18, 1976, Religious News Service, New York, N.Y.

2. Louis Harris poll, December 24, 1976, Religious News Service, New York, N.Y.



In his brilliant study *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*,<sup>4</sup> Prof. Bernard Bailyn of Harvard University writes:

In the intense political heat of the decade after 1763, the long popular, though hitherto inconclusive ideas about the world and America's place in it were fused into a comprehensive world view, unique in its moral and intellectual appeal. It is the development of this view, to the point of overwhelming persuasiveness to the majority of the American leaders, and the meaning this view gave to the events of the time, and not simply an accumulation of grievances, that explains the origins of the American Revolution. . . .

Study of the sources of the colonists' thought . . . reveals, at first glance, a massive, seemingly random eclecticism. . . . But ultimately this profusion of authorities is reducible to a few, distinct groups of sources and intellectual traditions dominated and harmonized into a single whole by the influence of one peculiar strain of thought, one distinctive tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Professor Bailyn identifies the following five "distinct groups of sources and intellectual traditions" from which we derive our nation's values, ideals, and practices: classical antiquity, Enlightenment rationalism, English common law, New England Puritanism, and opposition radical thought.

References to the classical authors abound in the writings of the American colonists. They saw parallels between their situation and the history of early republican Rome and the tyranny which followed. Nevertheless, Bailyn says, this classical learning illustrated but did not determine their beliefs about politics and society.

The same can be said of the European Enlightenment writers whom the colonists frequently cited. While they were more influential than the classical authors, they were "neither clearly dominant nor wholly determinative," according to Bailyn.

Nor did English common law finally determine their political beliefs. The colonists were well aware of its tradition as they were of Enlightenment rationalism, but they looked to the common law primarily as a source of history and experience.

Another "major source" was New England Puritanism, particularly covenant theology. Bailyn observes that the ideas developed in the course

of colonial history by writers and preachers contributed to America's sense of destiny.

Other historians have stressed the importance of the covenant.

For the covenant, the congregations claimed direct authority from the Bible and direct precedent in the history of Israel. "The Covenant of Grace is the very same now that it was under the Mosaic dispensation," stated William Brattle [MS, Sermons, Harvard College Library]. . . . Uriah Oakes in his election sermon of 1673 [*New England Pleaded With*] emphasized God's covenant with the Children of Israel and how they were led into the land of promise. When this question was considered at a general convention of ministers at Boston, on May 26, 1698, all save one agreed that "under the Old Testament the Church was constituted by a Covenant" [Increase Mather, *The Order of the Gospel*, p. 39].<sup>6</sup>

Mediated by the Puritans in New England, the Hebrew Scriptures became in many ways the "intellectual arsenal" of the American Revolution. The patriots "found precedent and inspiration" in the Hebrew Scriptures, "and the pulpits of the land, where public opinion was molded, resounded with their revolutionary summonses," as Rufus Lears asserts in his volume on *The Jews in America* (1954).

The exodus from Egypt was the classic model of liberation from tyranny; the colonies of America should also make their exodus. The ten tribes of Israel defied the arrogant son of Solomon and established their own government: the thirteen colonies should do likewise. The Hebrew prophets denounced kings and potentates, and God-fearing Americans may do the same. Even the call [selected from the Book of Leviticus] engraved on the Liberty Bell: "Proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof" [was symbolic of the attachment of the Founding Fathers to the Hebrew Scriptures]. Revolutionary doctrine became crystallized in the slogan "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." Indeed, those were the words which Franklin, Jefferson and John Adams proposed for the seal of the United States: they were to be inscribed around a picture of the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea. . . .

Not less potent was the influence of the Hebrew Scriptures in determining the basic political system of the new society that emerged from the War of Independence. To discredit the monarchy, preachers like the bold and brilliant Jonathan Mayhew of Boston held up the warning of the prophet Samuel against royalty. Samuel Langdon, the president of Harvard, considered the Jewish government "a perfect republic," and Ezra Stiles, the president of Yale, found in the American government the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. In his classic work, *History of the Rise*

4. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967). The "five distinct groups of sources and intellectual traditions" are a summary of material presented by Professor Bailyn in his chapter "Sources and Traditions," pp. 22-54.

5. Ibid., pp. 22-23.

6. Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *The Puritan Oligarchy: The Founding of American Civilization* (New York: Scribner's, 1947), pp. 57-58.



and *Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, the eminent nineteenth century historian, William Edward Lecky, declared that "the Hebraic mortar cemented the foundations of American democracy."<sup>7</sup>

Professor Clinton Rossiter emphasizes the role of the clergy in developing colonial thought.

Had ministers been the only spokesmen of the rebellion, had Jefferson, the Adamses, and Otis never appeared in print, the political thought of the Revolution would have followed almost exactly the same line—with perhaps a little more mention of God, but certainly no less of John Locke. In the sermons of the patriot ministers, who were responsible for one fifth to one fourth of the total output of political thought in this decade, we find expressed every possible refinement of the reigning political faith.<sup>8</sup>

But, most significant of all, was the mobilization of the ideas germinating in the fertile soil of the new land.

Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before, but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we are compelled to take. Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copies from any particular or previous writing, it [the Declaration] was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion. All its authority rests then on the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or in the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, etc.<sup>9</sup>

Professor Bailyn credits the opposition writers with bringing together the most important thoughts of New England Puritanism, English common law, Enlightenment rationalism, and the classical authors—ideas of social contract, English liberty, natural rights. In summary, the opposition radicals:

provided also a harmonizing force for the other, discordant elements in the political and social thought of the revolutionary generation. Within

7. Rufus Lears, *The Jews in America: A History* (New York: World, 1954), pp. 40-41.

8. Clinton Rossiter, *Seedtime of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1953), p. 328.

9. J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, *The Western Intellectual Tradition* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper & Row, 1962), p. 378; cf. Letter of May 8, 1825, to Henry Lee, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. P. L. Ford, 10 vols. (New York, 1892-99), vol. 10, p. 343.

the framework of these ideas, Enlightenment abstractions and common law precedents—covenant theology and classical analogy—Locke and Abraham, Brutus and Coke—could be brought together into a comprehensive theory of politics. It was in terms of this pattern of ideas and attitudes—originating in the English Civil War and carried forward with additions and modifications not on the surface of English political life but in its undercurrents stirred by doctrinaire libertarians, disaffected politicians, and religious dissenters—that the colonists responded to the new regulations imposed by England on her American colonies after 1763.<sup>10</sup>

The American revolutionary spokesmen realized that they needed a moral principle to underpin their political ideas. Professor Rossiter in his discussion of "the Moral Basis of Government"<sup>11</sup> develops the role of virtue that was rooted in colonial America and became increasingly important in the years of crisis preceding the Revolution.

In addition to approving all recognized Christian [and Jewish], Roman, and English virtues, colonial theorists singled out several attitudes or traits of special consequence for a free republic: first, the willingness to act morally without compulsion, to obey the laws of nature as interpreted by reason and the laws of man as established in consent; second, the love of liberty, the desire for the adventure and sacrifices of free government rather than the false security of tyranny; third, public spirit and patriotism, . . . fourth, official incorruptibility, a state of virtue saluted by Jefferson in the *Summary View* when he reminded George III that "the whole act of government consists in the art of being honest"; and fifth, industry and frugality, hard work and plain living, the only path to personal liberty and national independence. Special attention was devoted to the fifth of these qualities, for industry and frugality were essential to the success of America's program of economic resistance.<sup>12</sup>

To promote virtue the colonial thinkers prescribed "hortatory religion, — sound education, honest government, and a simple economy," Professor Rossiter observes. In sum, "just as religion, education, government, and agriculture could raise the level of public and private morality, so morality could strengthen each of these great human undertakings. . . . The business of political philosophers is to discover the virtues that lead to free government, and the form of government that leads men to virtue."<sup>13</sup>

10. See Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, pp. 53-54.

11. See Rossiter, *Seedtime of the Republic*, pp. 429-37.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 431.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 435.



The writer of this brief summary is not unmindful of the vulnerability of such an idealized presentation to the criticism of the "scientific historians" of the Johns Hopkins school and of the earlier "new historians" once led by James Henry Robinson, Charles Beard, Frederick Jackson Turner, and Carl Becker. Around the turn of the present century, this small group of seminal historians disowned their traditional function as "preservers and adapters of myths," and audaciously proclaimed that they would thenceforth seek and report only "the truth."

They unearthed long-forgotten facts demonstrating that the Founding Fathers had been a cantankerous lot, who fought one another in unseemly fashion for power and wealth. They revealed that intrigue and factional strife in Congress were common, and men of all factions embezzled funds, profited in securing army supplies, and that even George Washington and Robert Morris, "the great man" and the treasurer who financed the Revolution, were greedy and ruthless land speculators who made fortunes at one time or another on the basis of secret information.

Forrest McDonald, in his book *The Formation of the American Republic, 1776-1790*,<sup>14</sup> cut close to the bone when he wrote, "Where patriots stood in the spring of 'seventy-six, depended upon whether they believed in Original Sin." The hard-shelled republicans, Eastern and Southern, he observes,

shared a reverence for the classical republican virtues and a tendency to carry them to vices. The rectitude of their intentions was rarely questionable, but it sometimes veered to petty self-righteousness; they believed in and practiced simplicity, but oftentimes demanded impossible austerity of others; they were dedicated sometimes to the point of bigotry, and militant, sometimes to the point of paranoia. In public life, they heartily embraced the rationalist tradition, which meant that their thinking was systematic and encumbered by a minimum of superstition and sentimentality and that they believed in the natural rights of man and the possibility of a clean, rational break with the past. It also meant that when considering human affairs they tended to reason in straight logical lines from generalities to particulars, even when observation told them that the path to truth is variously curved. In private life, from aristocratic cultivation in Virginia and from Calvinistic indoctrination in Massachusetts stemmed a seriousness and sense of propriety that precluded enjoying humor or play or the pleasures of the flesh, save with a long hangover of guilt.

The nationalists [McDonald notes] were more flexible and somewhat more charitable in their views, of others as of themselves. All men were

14. Forrest McDonald, *The Formation of the American Republic, 1776-1790* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965). The following quotations occur on pp. 1-4.

ruled by avarice and ambition, and so must they be; but some men were less so than others. Indeed, some men were even worthy of trust; those who recognized that their motives were a compound of good and evil. In war, one served one's country out of patriotism, but also in pursuit of personal glory; in government, one filled public office out of esteem for a public trust, but all the while pursued personal gain. Those who pretended otherwise could never be trusted, for they were either knaves who masked their evil behind virtuous utterances or fools, who, believing their own purity, would also believe themselves damned to total corruption upon committing their (inevitable) final corrupt act.

In face of such diversity of motives and experiences, it is clear that a study of the American historic past will not contribute to any generalized knowledge of human behavior—once proclaimed as the primary purpose of American historians who studied "history as identity." Dr. Thomas Kuhn of Princeton University seems closer to realism when he declared:

Where one has got from history some sense of how to act in a particular pressing contemporary situation, one has got it not through generalizations produced from history, but from exposure to concrete historical narratives which increase one's experience of concrete events, very much in the absence of generalization that one could apply directly to the situation.<sup>15</sup>

Such cautions are a necessary antidote to messianic pretensions as well as to an apocalyptic eschatology which have bedeviled American history at its worst moments. At the same time, such caveats should not be allowed to obscure the formidable dynamic power of "the American dream" in which, as Jürgen Moltmann<sup>16</sup> has written, "the biblical, particularly the Old Testament symbology, dominates."

Asserting that "'the American dream' was dreamed in Europe," Professor Moltmann declares:

It was and is the dream of freedom for every human being; the land of unlimited possibilities and of justice without privileges. This was the dream of the politically oppressed, the religiously persecuted, the socially humiliated and the racially defamed. . . .

The American dream is basically nothing other than the transferral of the European dream of America to American soil. It is the fulfillment and the disappointment, the continuation and the reshaping of the European dream of America. Consequently, the American dream did not represent a

15. Thomas Kuhn, "Dialogues in History," *Daedalus* (Spring 1961), p. 247.

16. Jürgen Moltmann, "The American Dream," *Commonweal* 104:16 (August 3, 1977), pp. 490-96.



hope limited to America but had universal significance for all people who sought America as the fulfillment of the hope for freedom and justice.

The dream of freedom, equality and happiness for all human beings—"We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—is a *human dream*. It can only be fulfilled by humanity as a whole. As long as human beings are alienated from each other . . . this dream cannot be fulfilled. It also cannot be fulfilled as an *American dream*; for as a nation, a world power and a culture, America must take part in the alienation, separation and oppression of human beings. The human dream cannot be Americanized without being falsified through the ideological self-justification of the American empire and the free enterprise of the multinational corporations. As a human dream, the American dream is a true and necessary one. As an American dream, however, it makes the human dream impossible.

This contradiction, Moltmann adds,

is similar to that of Soviet ideology: the "establishment of socialism in one country" destroys through race identification the socialism of humanity. "Socialism" is falsified through the self-justifying terms of Russian hegemony. If the United States understands itself as "this nation under God" (Abraham Lincoln) or as the "champion of democracy" then ambiguities inevitably arise. Was the Vietnam war really executed for the freedom of the Vietnamese people or for the United States' own interests? At the time, one could hear both claims. The humanization of the American dream would make the United States a blessing for other peoples. But the Americanization of the human dream also makes the United States a burden for other peoples. Thus, the test question for United States foreign policy will be: will the "moral conscience" (Jimmy Carter) be realized in the demand for liberation and the respect for human rights in Latin America, Asia and Africa, or will the interests of American big business be further served through the ideology of "national security" (through the National Security Council) at the cost of other peoples?

The "humanization of the American dream"—that could well serve as the beacon light for our nation and for the world community through the dark decades ahead. Leaders from every field who speak to the human conscience need to help people, humankind, break out of the obsessional preoccupations with personal, materialist satisfactions, petty intergroup and interreligious rivalries, and concentrate on understanding and coping with central priority issues of our time, on whose resolution the very survival of mankind itself depends. And, above all, people need hope, a reinvigoration of morale, that can come from a recommitment to the

fundamental moral and ethical values that, despite ambiguities and detours, are the foundation stones of the American experiment.

The challenges and opportunities have been well stated by Isaac Asimov in his essay "Is There a Hope for the Future?"<sup>17</sup>

It is particularly easy to be pessimistic about the future right now. We need merely assume that population will continue going up; that national rivalries will continue to place the well-being of Group X ahead of the welfare of the world; that racist and sexist prejudice will continue to generate hatred and alienation; that personal and economic greed will continue to ruin the earth for short-term private profit—in short we need merely assume that things will go on, exactly as they have been, for another thirty years, and we can confidently predict the destruction of our — technological civilization.

And Asimov adds, "I suspect, that the chances are better than 50 percent that this will happen; how much better, I am not certain."

But his conclusion is no less important than his fatalistic analysis.

If, however, we can shift quickly enough in the direction of population control and world government [implying, I take that to mean, an effective means of stemming the deadly nuclear proliferation, containing the absurd arms race, meeting the needs of the starving and the impoverished, finding jobs and decent shelter of the underclass here and abroad, putting the lid on political-ideological warfare as in Ireland, Lebanon, Cyprus, Uganda, and elsewhere, promoting human rights and civil liberties as in the Soviet Union and East European countries as well as in Latin America] and can hang on for thirty years, the long-range future—within the later lifetime of the young people alive today—can be made incredibly bright..

We will then have a twenty-first century that will be the dream of an older generation of science-fiction writers (writing prior to the current fashion of darkness and doom) come true. Imagine a world in which the scourge of war is eliminated and the horrors of sexism and racism are wiped out, in which lives are expanded and enriched, and in which all of space is opened to us.

If we can only get through *this* crisis.<sup>18</sup>

17. Isaac Asimov, "Is There a Hope for the Future?" *Science Past, Science Future* (New York: Ace Books, 1975), pp. 413ff.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 430.



The Black  
Experience  
and Perspective



## Introduction

A special feeling of kinship and unique solidarity engages a Jewish reader of Dr. Benjamin Mays's moving essay. His calm, even magisterial, depiction of the tragic victimization of the black people in America reverberates in the Jewish soul which has experienced analogous suffering in the Christian West, but only of longer duration and in some ways—climaxed in the Nazi Holocaust—more devastating.

That comment is not meant to minimize or to detract from the magnitude of the pain that our black brothers and sisters have been forced to endure. It would be macabre and pathological for victims to contest with one another over whose suffering has been greater! Rather, it is to suggest that Jews who are cognizant of their history during the past 1,900 years approach black Americans with an empathy that is existential, not learned abstractly from textbooks.

The parallel experiences of persecution and exile, of being reduced to pariahs, have cast both blacks and Jews in a prophetic circumstance. Both their histories and their biblical theologies require of blacks and Jews—indeed, their very identities as particular kinds of human beings compel them—to cast critical questions before every American ideologue, or any other ideologue, who wishes to proclaim his or her system of values or ideals as ultimates that demand total obedience or apotheosis. Neither an "imperial president" of the right nor a messianic liberator of the left whose totalist ideologies would demand idolatry—giving ultimate loyalty to that which can claim only partial loyalty—should ever be able to deceive especially blacks or Jews who have had engraved the Psalmist's warning in their scarred bodies: "Trust not in princes or in the son of man for in them there is no salvation."

As a son of Russian-Polish immigrants to the United States, I have a very deep appreciation, more than that, profound love for this democratic republic. To my impoverished parents, and to millions like them who came to these shores escaping from indentured poverty, vicious prejudice, and denial of basic human liberties, America has been the "promised land." And in our present world in which democratic liberties and human rights are increasingly restricted and are in retreat, the United States with all its failings stands out as still the freest of nations and the greatest hope of economic justice and social equality.

Precisely because the burden of defending human liberty and justice now weighs most heavily on the shoulders of the American republic can it

least afford illusions and vanities. And the foremost vanity which Dr. Mays's essay (and the Jewish experience) would seek to submit to critical judgment is that of the continued traces in our nation of Anglo-Saxon Christian *hubris*. "Hubris" is defined by Ernest Becker in his *Escape from Evil* (New York: Free Press, 1975) as "forgetting where the real source of power lies and imagining that it is in oneself."

After careful reflection, I am forced to conclude that the Bicentennial observances, worthy as a national objective, failed miserably. It was in the main an exercise in manipulated nostalgia, boosterism, hucksterism, cheap and frequently vulgar commercialism. And its main failing derived from this national addiction to *hubris*, self-worship whose central liturgical affirmation after two hundred years was still that the proper way to be considered a true American is in the Anglo-Saxon Christian model.

With the rarest exceptions, the Bicentennial programs that proliferated in virtually every hamlet of America taught the vast majority of two hundred million Americans practically nothing about the actual, agonizing history of the black people of this nation. It took eight one-hour television programs called "Roots" to begin finally to tell that decisive chapter of American history to the entire American people. It took a brilliant black author, Alex Haley, and interestingly, the cooperation of a Jewish producer, David Wolper (who had earlier produced a much-less acclaimed documentary of the Jewish historic experience) to inform America—after two centuries—that there is no such thing as a single, monochromatic, "official" American history, but that America makes no historic sense unless the nation knows the histories of all its constituent parts.

Thus, Dr. Mays summons us all to a primary task on the eve of our third century—to confront our vast ignorance of our own peoples—blacks, but also Hispanics, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Evangelicals, Greeks, the whole ethnic and religious depth of our nation which is the keystone of understanding our pluralism. Each of the religious, racial, and ethnic groups conducted education and information programs during the Bicentennial year—witness the especially ambitious program of the Catholic bishops. In the main, they were talking to themselves, not informing the nation and those who needed it most.

In the absence of that understanding, caricatures and distortions will continue to prevail. President Jimmy Carter had to suffer the latent and widespread stereotypes and hidden bigotries against Evangelical



Christians. Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz could confidently, even arrogantly, discharge himself of dirty little jokes about Pope Paul and blacks. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General George Brown felt free to repeat the most vicious canards against the alleged "Jewish conspiracy." FTC Commissioner Paul Dixon felt comfortable in a cruel attack on "that dirty Arab," Ralph Nader. When will the Anglo-Saxon "elites" of America—many of them good "churchgoing" people as were the slavemasters—learn that the vast majority of the American people are sick and tired of their vile abuses, their verbal violence against the dignity and honor of millions of our citizens?

The first Anglo-Saxons who settled this nation saw themselves as God's "chosen people." But blacks and Jews, who apparently have taken the Bible seriously as a lamp unto their feet and not as a weapon for suppression, will need to provide still the necessary hermeneutic—blacks and Jews both have understood "chosenness" to mean especial responsibility to live God's way of justice, compassion, and equality, and not an invitation to privilege and dominance.

If the nation at large will educate itself about the actual histories and religious lives of both blacks and Jews, not the caricatures and mythologies that continue to prevail, it will learn that in few places in America and elsewhere (in Africa and in Israel, for example) are the events of Exodus and Sinai as alive as they are among these saving remnants. Both blacks and Jews experienced the Divine Presence as a Liberator from oppression and slavery. Both blacks and Jews carry in their hearts and bones the experience and instruction of Sinai where a former slave people experienced the revelation as God's moral will which transformed them into "a kingdom of priests and a holy people." Both among blacks and Jews, with whom the Old Testament prophets live as almost nowhere else, is there a consciousness that "justice and righteousness" are the diadems engraved on the throne of the Holy One.

As often happens, the particular bursts with the universal. If we learn as a nation to know and to appreciate not only the agonies but the spiritual and human richness and accomplishment that inheres in each of these minority communities, and if we learn that they live and thrive in America's pluralism not by sufferance but by right, natural right and divine right, we may yet learn that this talent of valuing difference not as a threat but as a source of enrichment may yet become the most important legacy of our Bicentennial. And if we genuinely learn that monumental truth, we may still—if God gives us the time before a

nuclear Armageddon—be able to learn to appreciate and live amicably with all the other nations of the world, who have the same claims as do we to be God's human family.

MARC H. TANENBAUM



## Response

In 1654, twenty-three Jewish refugees fled the Portuguese Inquisition in Recife, Brazil, and embarked on the French privateer *Saint Charles* to New Amsterdam where they petitioned for asylum and residence. At the wharf of the ostensibly "liberal" Dutch colony, the twenty-three Jewish "illegal aliens" were greeted by Governor Peter Stuyvesant and his Council who promptly ordered them to depart.

Jewish merchants in Holland, among them some major shareholders in the Dutch West India Company, supported their co-religionists' right to remain in New Netherlands, which was in fact seeking immigrants to help build the Dutch colony in the New World. Governor Stuyvesant pleaded vigorously against extending rights to the Jews. In October 1655, he wrote to the directors of the Dutch West India Company in Amsterdam, "Giving them (the Jews) liberty, we cannot refuse the Lutherans and the Papists."<sup>1</sup>

After repeated petitions and pressure from affluent Dutch Jews in Holland, this hapless group of Jewish men, women, and children were finally allowed to remain—the first Jewish immigrants to America. But they had to wage a continuous struggle for the minimal rights to engage in trade, to own property, to serve in the militia, and to gain citizenship. The rights to work at crafts, to hold public office, to build a synagogue, or to engage in public religious services were never won in New Amsterdam. These were to come later, after incessant struggle over decades by Jews in New York and then in every colony of the new nation.<sup>2</sup>

As Michael Novak demonstrates persuasively in his essay, nativist prejudices of anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism run very deep in American culture. A Jew as well as a Catholic utters such a judgment, with evident ambivalences. On the one hand, it is a manifest truth that, despite the deep-seated intolerances, bigotries, and discriminations against non-Anglo-Saxon Protestant minorities throughout much of our nation's two-hundred-year history, both Catholic and Jewish communities have achieved what the Rev. Andrew Greeley has characterized in his latest book as "an ethnic miracle."<sup>3</sup>

1. Abraham J. Karp, *Golden Door to America—The Jewish Immigrant Experience* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976).

2. Rufus Lears, *The Jews in America* (Cleveland: World, 1954).

3. Andrew Greeley, *An Ugly Little Secret: Anti-Catholicism in North America* (Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, 1977).



Contrary to the popular images promoted in the academic and media worlds that "the blue-collar ethnics" are illiterate, second-rate, and impoverished, the Reverend Greeley writes (as corroborated by Michael Novak in this essay):

The eastern and southern European immigrants now have a higher college attendance rate than the national average for young people of college age. . . . In the space of a single generation, between 1945 and 1975, Poles and Italians have surpassed the national average in college attendance. (The Irish, incidentally, also surpassed the national average, and they did it in 1910.)

Eastern and southern European immigrants not only earn more money than the national average for whites but also more than British Protestants. Those who could not assimilate have become successful. . . . Irish Catholics, for example, are the richest, the best educated, and the most occupationally successful of any Gentile group in American society. And in terms of income at least, the Italian Catholics are right behind them—and moving up fast.

Greeley concludes, "Reformers didn't manage to Americanize us in the public schools and . . . there is substantial evidence that it is precisely the strong values of home, family, and neighborhood that facilitated the educational, economic, and occupational success of the ethnics."<sup>4</sup>

As anyone conversant with the sociological literature knows, similar empirical evidence documents "the ethnic miracle" of American Jewry whose socio-economic status is at least comparable to that of Episcopalians and Presbyterians. The academic achievement of the Jewish community, which is the "secret" of Jewish mobility and attainment, is probably the highest of any religious-ethnic group in America.

In the face of such unparalleled historic achievement for Catholic and Jewish ethnics—both of whom are authentic embodiments of the "rags-to-riches" mythos of America—the most appropriate human responses are those of deep gratitude and appreciation for the opportunities which American society made possible. Gratitude not only for opportunities for realizing material abundance and security, but as well for the authentic and equally unparalleled experiences of religious, political, and civic freedoms in which both communities have flourished spiritually and intellectually.

But the negative, destructive horn of the ambivalence remains, and cannot be ignored. There is underrepresentation of Catholics in the elite,

4. Ibid., pp. 72–75.

decision-making centers of American life, which by and large are WASP preserves—the foundations, the universities, the media, the board rooms of major corporations and banks. When General George Brown and the discredited former vice-president, Spiro Agnew, blithely hurl anti-Semitic stereotypes across the nation's media of "Jewish control of America," they are in fact diverting attention from the scandalous reality that the leadership and control of the real centers of American financial and industrial power, the *Fortune* 500 corporations, are virtually "Judenrein" in their "executive suites" and their "social clubs" where the business contracts of heavy industry and multinational corporations are negotiated. All our "executive suite" studies continue to demonstrate that Jews—as well as Catholic ethnics, blacks, and Hispanics—are excluded from the management levels of the major banks, the public utilities, the insurance companies, the *sanctum sanctorum* of Protestant power and domination of America's wealth.

It is critical for the future self-understanding and democratic well-being of America that the nation faces up in a wholly conscious way to Michael Novak's major thesis; namely, that "Protestant Christianity is the single most determinative cultural force on the American character." It is not my interest to do unto Protestants what Protestants have frequently done unto Catholics, Jews, blacks, and "foreigners," that is, engage in the latest form of bigotry and scapegoating, "anti-Waspsism."

But Novak's analysis of the formative influences of the constituent elements of "the Protestant way"—or more accurately, "the several Protestant ways"—is not simply nostalgic reflections on a past heritage, but a statement about clear and present forces that continue to impact on the lives of non-Protestants and on the domestic and foreign policy-making of American society.

With candor and courage, Novak lays out the elements in this threefold pattern:

(1) "The American Protestant style places an extraordinary degree of weight upon 'moral' factors in social situations. . . . The Protestant style in America is to use the word 'moral' as a club by which to undermine the standing of others. By presenting one's own interests as 'moral,' one realizes them as effortlessly as possible."

(2) "The American Protestant style also has a manifest anti-institutional bias. . . . The Protestant tendency, as Rollo May has put it, is to desire a world innocent of power and politics."

(3) "The American Protestant style is, finally, a style of revival—of moral spasm. Intense moral outrage leads to hurried rituals of refor-



mation, ends in quick forgetfulness. . . . Laws of power, self-interest, and institutional necessity require practical and lasting compromises. Striving for purity, the children of light often reject those modest compromises that might bring small but real and long-term relief."

Let me illustrate how real and potentially serious that style of Protestant moralizing can be. As is generally known, the safety and security, the very existence of the State of Israel and its three million inhabitants, are supreme issues of moral, spiritual, and human concern to the Jewish people everywhere. After the loss of one-third of the Jewish family to the murder-machine of the Nazi Holocaust, it is simply unendurable psychologically to any Jewish conscience that any credence whatsoever could be given to Article 15 of the Palestine Liberation Organization's Covenant which calls for the destruction of the State of Israel, its replacement by a so-called secular democratic Palestinian state (what the PLO wrought in Lebanon, especially to its Christian Maronite community whose power has been fatally destroyed, is a paradigm of what the PLO means by pluralism and coexistence in a "secular, democratic state"), and the use of terror and violence as justifiable means for realizing the PLO's "self-determination."

The following are true accounts of what I actually experienced with liberal Protestant church officials:

(1) Two years ago, the director of overseas missions of one of the major liberal Protestant denominations, in a face-to-face "dialogue," told me in exactly these words, "The right of the State of Israel to exist is by no means a closed issue. Israel may have to be dismantled for the sake of world peace." (Some months later, the WASP president of one of our nation's leading banks declared, "Israel is standing in the way of increased trade with the Arab nations. I hate to say it, but Israel may just have to go down the tube in our national interest.")

(2) In recent years, liberal Protestant church officials have joined with Arab propagandists and American oil companies in attacking "the Israel lobby" or "the Jewish lobby" in Washington as being somehow "un-American." What is not generally known is that in April 1977 and again in October 1977, these same liberal Protestant moralists met with Arabist members of the State Department and drafted a strategy for producing a series of resolutions for adoption by liberal Protestant church assemblies that would recognize "the PLO as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people," as well as bring "one-sided leverage" on Israel.

In September 1977, the Arab missions people of the United Presbyterian Church drafted exactly such a resolution, had it printed and

placed in the kit of all the delegates to the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church meeting in Philadelphia. The delegates—local pastors and lay delegates from across the country—declared spontaneously on the Assembly floor that they refused "to baptize the PLO and terrorism as legitimate." They voted down the pro-PLO resolution by a 75 to 25 percent vote, and adopted instead a balanced resolution that recognized Israel's right to security as well as the legitimate rights of Palestinians—which the majority of the Jewish people support. (What form of nationhood these rights will take is to be worked out by the hard negotiation of political compromise.)

(3) In November 1977, the Division of Overseas Ministries of the National Council of Churches drafted a similar initial text that was anti-Israel and pro-PLO. The text went through several reformulations, but even the final version was filled with moralistic, pietistic jargon. Quintessential example: "Righteousness among men is prior to their security and peace, for these latter depend ultimately upon relationships which men recognize to be at least tolerably just." For my part, I would not trust the security of my children to such "righteousness."

The mentality and rhetoric of these liberal Protestant church bureaucrats toward Israel, the Palestinians, and the Middle East are a classic illustration of the "Protestant moralism" that Novak describes. Beneath the high-sounding, moralistic phrases, with all their suggestion of altruism and perfectionism, are obscured the naked power and financial interests of these elements within liberal Protestantism. If you will read the *Handbook of Missions*, you will find a fascinating statistic which these moralistic churchmen never acknowledge in any of these discussions: American liberal Protestantism provides 70 percent of the finances of their missionary installations in Arab countries as well as in other overseas areas. They also provide close to 70 percent of the missionary personnel in these countries.

I happen to hold to a Jewish theology of Christianity which looks favorably upon constructive missionary enterprises as instruments which have brought the covenant of Israel to the farthest reaches of the earth. If not for Christian missions, millions of people might never have been exposed to the Torah and its redemptive message of love of God and love of fellowman. But I am appalled by the hypocrisy and the double standards. When Catholic ethnics engage in political action that is specifically Catholic their action is sneered at as "machine politics"; when Jews engage in political action designed to secure the lives of millions of their brothers and sisters, their action is "the Jewish lobby" which is somehow



to be disdained as conspiratorial and "un-American" and smacks of "double loyalty." When liberal Protestant church bureaucrats engage in identical behavior with their friends in the State Department and in the U.S. Congress or the White House, that is the work of salvation.

Reinhold Niebuhr earned the reverence of Jews and Catholics as well as Protestants because he refused to play such moral shell-games with himself as well as with others. He wrote (with Alan Heimert) in *A Nation So Conceived*:

Our pressure on all previous sovereignties who shared the hemisphere with us and the tenacity of our land hunger under the moral sanction of what our patriots called "manifest destiny" may have given the first intimation of the formation of a unique national characteristic or trait of character, namely, the expression of a vital impulse in the name of an ideal. For we began our history by claiming the sanction of a democratic ideal for an imperial impulse, which was ostensibly disavowed and overcome by these same democratic principles.<sup>5</sup>

Professor Niebuhr concluded with advice for coping with such dangerous moralism that is as appropriate today as when he wrote in 1963:

Democracy [this great Protestant prophet asserted] is an ultimate norm of political organization in the sense that no better way has been found to check the inordinancy of the powerful on the one hand and the confusion of the multitude on the other than by making every center of power responsible to the people whom it affects; by balancing subordinate centers with other centers of power to prevent injustice; and by denying immunity from criticism to any organ or mouthpiece of prestige and authority.<sup>6</sup>

In the third century of America's unfolding, the tolerated ethnics may well bear the providential task of prophetically checking "the inordinancy of the powerful" and of "denying immunity from criticism to any organ or mouthpiece of prestige and authority."

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5. Reinhold Niebuhr and Alan Heimert, *A Nation So Conceived* (New York: Scribner's, 1963), p. 10.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 127.