

# Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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A great age and a frightened America, 1952.

# A GREAT AGE AND A FRIGHTENED AMERICA

April 6, 1952

My dear friends, this age in which we live is a truly great age, one of the greatest in human history. We are too near our times properly to appraise them. One requires distance in order to see great objects in their proper perspective. We are too much involved ourselves in the turmoil and the fears, the conflicts and the passions, of our day to be able to see objectively the amazing new pattern of life which our turbulent age is evolving. In a generation or two, when mankind will shall have entered quieter waters, when a period of consolidation, a period of crystallization, will come to pass and will follow this dynamic age of ours, an age of ferment and of revolutionary changes - I say, in a generation or two mankind with darkest forebodings.

Many people today are quite pessimistic about this era in which we live.

They are quick to describe it as materialistic, as an age which is lacking in idealism, as an aimle ss and a purposelessage, an age which is drifting helplessly to some unavoidable abyse, to some dreadful day of reckoning, day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, as the prophet Zephaniah would describe it.

Now, this mood, this pessimistic mood is prevalent not alone among relfgious leaders or moral teachers, who having despeired of this world in which we
live today and of the possibility of ever correcting its evils, of finding an even
keel for this storm-tessed ship - they have turned their hopes away from any idea
of possible human progress to other-worldliness, to some kind of spiritual escapism.

I say, this mood is prevalent not alone among religious teachers, but also among the our
laymen in all walks of life. There is a note of crisis abroad in our world. Men
talk of economic collapse, of mother world war, There is fear in the hearts of
men, and certainly what we see every day about us of these feverish preparations
the feat and the West when well conflict halls, are cyclophen

for war, of the violent recriminations and the veiled threats hurled by one part of the world against the other, of the failure of every attempt, one after another, to come to some kind of an understanding on any issue which is calculated to reduce the tensions in the world - what one sees every day of the increasing number of erupting political incidents and the danger zones all over the globe - I say that all this cannot help but feed a mood of depression and pessimism.

There are very few people who think of this age of ours as a great age; but of it as a great age, while there is room for grave concern about all that is happening in our world, there is in my mind no reason at all for depression or despair. Great things are coming to passin our day. I am not referring to the new the new waights into the nature , walls continvally worlds which science is discovering for mankind, to the new sources of power and energy and wealth, so the new and revolutionary methods of production and distribution, and transportation and communication all over the world. I am not referring augzing progress in the undited sciences which has so markedly to the great new medical discoveries which tend to improve the health of the human in cool the fundamental for the human race and prolong human life. I am not referring to the marvels of engineering to munno the miracles of construction all over the globe. There are too many and too apparrent to cast for any comment. Inventions of all kinds are so numerous in our day and discoveries are can in such reflix tocas excite any showing that they no longer evoke any excited comment from people. We take it all in our stride - the flying age, the television age, the atomic age - and what next? The inter-planetary age, perhaps. Certainly, man is achieving in our day in the scientific fields more in a year than in a 100 years in the past, in a whole cycle of Cathay. I am thinking i at

But I am thinking of our age as a great age in terms of social progress, well in terms of human advancement, in terms of civilization. More is being done in our day for the common man and for the average man, for the improvement of the conditions of his life, for the raising of his standard of living, for his health, for his education, for his protection against the disabilities of sickness and unemployment and old age, than in any generation, in any five generations in the past. Never was as

much thought given to the individual, to the common man, never were governments so much concerned with improving the let of the common man of the masses, I mean of those vast segments of humanity who in the past were the forgotten men, the exploited and the down-trodden, who lived in unspeakable poverty and ignorance and disease and life long misery. Never was so much progress made in the field of improving the lot of that common man as in our day. Never was so much social legislation — industrial, agragian — enacted to protect the working man, to protect the laborer, to protect the child, the protect women in industry, as in our day. Never were more determined efforts made to bring about a fairer sharing of the wealth and the goods which are being produced, and to make education available to all mengant

Never have the submerged races and peoples of Asia and Africa and of other parts of the earth, who for sountless centuries duffered under foreign or native tyranny and despotion—never have they risen to demand and have achieved, to a find that the form the demand and have achieved, to a find that the form the demand and have achieved, to a find the form that the form the destroy onialism have received their death-blow in our day. Backward peoples are pressing forward into the light of a new day for themselves, and the supremacy of the white race and its rule over the dark races of the earth is rapidly drawing to a close.

New, I do not wish to overdraw the picture. I am not suggesting that our age is by way of achieving an idyllic society. I do not wish to suggest that we are quickly ushering in the millenium. The millenium is not around the corner.

There is not a spot on the globe me today where there are not make evils, social wrongs and injustices, and where the masses, to a greater or lesser degree, are still underprivileged and disadvantaged. There is no country on earth that is altogether free from class struggle, from bigotry, from intolerance, from slums or any specific all the peoples of the world will possess what some of the most favored peoples of the world already possess today. And What has lath homes.

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Rut, the important thing to consider is not whether we are on the eve of I millenium, but whether the major trends of our age are in the direction of the good society, of the hoped-for good society, or away from it. Is our age breaking chains and removing shackles from men and nations, or not? Is our age removing barriers, or not? Is it extending the opportunities of education? Is it extenand eleterny atically trying to eradicate poverty and to raise the standard of living for all peoples, regardless of race or color or credd? Is it trying to satisfy the legitnatural to freedom and independence? Is it trying to organize the world for peace and for international cooperation for the common good? I believe that in all these directions, in all these major trends, which are significant and determinant, our age has given evidence of great determination and of, considerable The It is where try to wite that progress. It is moving in the right direction. The concern with the rights of man and this is interesting to note, frequently overlooked - that the concern with the rights of the human being, as such, has not been limited to the governments of the free and democratic countries alone. Communism, too, regardless of the methods which it employs and of which we do not approve, has made the improvement of the & Common wan of the human being its chief concern and its battle cry. The evils which it has wrought in the employment of the wrong method of progress should not blind us to the positive good which it has achieved for the masses of the Russian peoples in terms of education, in terms of raising their standard of living, which for cenand the does of the sustantally me turies were denied them by Czarist despotism.

what has created the mood of crisis in our day is not that our age is not which was distributed to the making progress, but the conflict concerning the method of human progress. It is a crisis of method - the democratic method for human advancement as against the method of dictatorship. Each is claims to be the best and quickest way of achieving of establishing the good society; that is to say, of establishing the best conditions of life not for any one class or any one group, for for all men. The ends which they have in mind are practically the same. Their social idealism is practically the same.

The conflict is really not one of ideology, but one of methodology.

But it is a dangerous conflict, and it is tearing our world apart, and it is this crisis of method that has filled the minds of men today with apprehension for and with apocalyptic dread, as if we were approaching some chasm, some fatal abyss.

New, If ways could be found which would permit both of these contrasting methods to prove themselves in action, to work themselves out in their respective spheres and countries, without trying to destroy one another, human progress would be tremendously accelerated, the rich promise of our day would be realized, and a new mood of optimism would infuse the hearts of men.

Now, It has been my conviction that such ways can be found, and it is the task of inspired statesmanship in our day to find them. If Communism were like fascism and Nazism, committed to human inequality; if Communism were committed to the creation of a society of the clite, of super-men who would live off and thrive upon the subjugation and the exploitation of the lower class of society which is basic to the philosophy of Fascism; if Communism aimed, as did Fascism and Nazism, to enthrone one superior race over all others and to dominate all others, and to call other and to the communism were committed to the ideals and traditions of militarism and the idealization of war, as Fascism and Nazism were, then no way could possibly be found to enable them two systems to live together for long in the same world.

But these are not the ideals of Communism. They are not found in their texts and in their official scriptures, they are not taught to their youth, they are not propagated in their press or in their literature. They abhor these conceptions quite as much as we do.

Therefore, I say that masmuch as their basic ethical ideals concerning the status and the destiny of the individual man, being more or less the common to destrine and teaching of both of these systems, ways can be found, should be found which would make it possible for them to live and to work out their destinies in the

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### The Black Silence of Fear

EXTENSION OF REMARKS

## HON. THOMAS J. LANE

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 1, 1952

Mr. Lane. Mr. Speaker, under leave to extend my remarks, I wish to include the following article from the January 13, 1952, issue of the New York Times magazine, by William O. Douglas, an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court:

THE BLACK SILENCE OF FEAR (By William O. Douglas)

There is an omnious trend in this Nation. We are developing tolerance only for the orthodox point of view on world affairs, intolerance for new or different approaches. Orthodoxy normally has stood in the path of change. Orthodoxy was always the stronghold of the status quo, the enemy of new ideas—at least new ideas that were disturbing. He who was wedded to the orthodox view was isolated from the challenge of new facts.

The democratic way of life rejects standardized thought. It rejects orthodoxy. It wants the fullest and freest discussion, within peaceful limits, of all public issues. It encourages constant search for truth at the periphery of knowledge.

We as a people have probably never lived up to that standard in any of our communities. But it has been an ideal toward which most of our communities have strived. We have over the years swung from tolerance to intolerance and back again. There have been eras of intolerance when the views of

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There are those who are deeply opposed, many of whom put that issue beyond the pale of discussion. There are even some who make the crucial test of one's loyalty or sanity his acceptance or rejection of our

present policy toward Asia.

The question of our Asian policy illustrates the need for a wide range of free public discussion. Asia poses probably the most critical issues of the day. Certain it is that if Asia, like China, is swept into the political orbit of Soviet Russia, the Soviets will then command or be able to immobilize the bulk of the people of the world, the bulk of the wealth of the world.

If that happens, it is doubtful if we, with all our atomic bombs, could even win a war. The great danger of this period is not inflation, nor the national debt, nor atomic The great, the critical danger is warfare. that we will so limit or narrow the range of permissible discussion and permissible thought that we will become victims of the orthodox school. If we do, we will lose flexibility. We will lose the capacity for expert management. We will then become wedded to a few techniques, to a few devices. They will define our policy and at the same time limit our ability to alter or modify it. Once we narrow the range of thought and discussion, we will surrender a great deal of our We will become like the man on the power. toboggan who can ride it but who can neither steer it nor stop it.

The mind of man must always be free. The strong society is one that sanctions and encourages freedom of thought and expression. Where there is that freedom, a nation has resiliency and adaptability. When freedom of expression is supreme, a nation will

keep its balance and stability.

Our real power is our spiritual strength, and that spiritual strength stems from our civil liberties. If we are true to our traditions, if we are tolerant of a whole market place of ideas, we will always be strong. Our weakness grows when we become intolerant of opposing ideas, depart from our standards of civil liberties, and borrow the policeman's philosophy from the enemy we detest.

That has been the direction of our drift. It is dangerous to the morale of our people; it is destructive to the influence and prestige of our country; it is depriving us of our resiliency, much of our inventive genius.

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gr re p tion against the bad behavior of states. In doing so, it forgets the limitations on the effectiveness of military coalition. . . . We see that the legalistic approach is closely identified with the concept of total war and total victory, and the manifestations of the one spill over only too easily into the manifestations of the other. And the concept of total war is something we would all do well to think about a little in these troubled times. . . . It is not only a question now of the desirability of this concept; it is a question of its feasibility. . . . In a sense, there is not total victory short of genocide, unless it be a victory over the minds of men. But the total military victories are rarely victories over the minds of men. . . . I am frank to say that I think there is no more dangerous delusion, none that has done us a greater disservice in the past or that threatens to do us a greater disservice in the future than the concept of total victory (pp. 99-102).

The dichotomy between "international morality" and "national interest" is not the fruit of moral or mental confusion. It is an inescapable imperative of effective political action in every system of sovereignties in which statesmen must be concerned with calculations of power while moralists and laymen, bewitched with the legal fiction that "states" are "persons," are no less concerned with the precepts of ethics. Since other powers feeling themselves threatened by an expanding power will at