



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

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Keep America free, just, tolerant and united!, 1939.

Keep America Free, Just, Tolerant  
, and United!

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER, OF CLEVELAND, OHIO, AT THE CONVENTION OF THE AMERICAN LEGION IN CHICAGO, ILL. ON SEPTEMBER 27, 1939.

I am deeply grateful for the privilege of addressing this convention. The American Legion was born in war and it now meets again in a world at war. But your dominant interest has, at all times, been not war but peace, and your chief concern has been not foreign affairs but the preservation of American ideals and institutions at home.

At no time in the last twenty turbulent years has there been greater need for that sound and constructive policy which the American Legion has been pursuing than at present. We need today more than ever warm forthright and resolute thinking and action guided by only one principle: how best to safeguard and advance the highest interests and noblest traditions of our nation. This is no time for narrow partisanship, for irresponsible demagoguery, for self-proclaimed prophetic monopolists, either of peace or righteousness, or for deceptive slogans and catch-words.

We all want peace. We all want America to stay out of this war. We shall all do our utmost to help keep America out of this war. We know the horrible toll and the critical folly of war. But men of equal sincerity and loyalty can and do honestly differ as to the best means of achieving this end. Whether our ~~present~~ present Neutrality laws are best calculated to keep us truly neutral and out of danger of involvement in this war or whether a revision is necessary in order to keep a colossal and unmerited advantage from going to one of the belligerents is a question concerning which there can be and is a sharp and honest division of opinion. Our chosen representatives in Congress have been called upon to render a decision - a decision which will naturally be binding upon all of us. But it serves no good purpose and it is a distinct disservice to America to surround the discussion of this vital issue which requires the utmost of reasoned judgment, with hysteria, to attempt to stampede our legislators with organized tumult and uproar, ~~and~~ to brand as war-mongers all those who favor a revision of our Neutrality legislation.

Nor is it consistent with the facts, or a contribution to clear thinking, or a service to humanity, to popularize the idea that in the European struggle now raging

there are no basic issues involved with which the American people need be at all concerned, or that all belligerents are equally culpable, or that America stands to lose nothing if Hitlerism and Stalinism succeed in destroying the last few outposts of democracy and freedom in the Western World. We need never fear the invasion of our country by foreign armies, especially if we are strong enough in our military defenses. But if that political barbarism which has swept over Europe in recent years, destroying one independent and free country after another, grossly violating the rights of minorities, scrapping all covenants and treaties, stamping out human freedom wherever it reaches, persecuting all religions, extolling militarism, force and conquest, and converting Europe first into an arsenal and then into a battlefield - if that political barbarism triumphs in this war, and France and England are defeated and in turn fall prey to dictatorship, <sup>it will not be</sup> ~~not~~ its armies, <sup>which</sup> will invade our shores, but its doctrines; and those subversive groups in our country which have worried us not a little in recent years will increase and multiply a thousand-fold, draw strength and inspiration from the universal triumph of dictatorship abroad, and they will become not a potential but an ~~an~~ actual menace to our American democracy. It is doubtful whether in a world in which the last beacons of freedom will have been extinguished by the fierce winds of dictatorship that our own torch of freedom can remain <sup>unquenched</sup> ~~burning~~.

So let us try to think clearly and realistically in these difficult times. Above all, let us in these days when nations are again <sup>met</sup> ~~meeting~~ in the dread Valley of Decision, keep steadily before our eyes and before the eyes of our children the clear vision of what America is and what we want America to remain. There are those in our midst who in the name of Americanism are destroying Americanism. There are those loud pseudo-champions of patriotism who are in reality the sinister purveyors of all forms of alienism in our midst. There are many men and groups in our land, some sincere but deluded victims of shrewd <sup>as</sup> ~~propanda~~, others paid agents and spies of foreign governments and still others just temperamental bigots and fanatics who are helping in one war or another, wittingly or unwittingly, to destroy the American Ideal.

What is this American Ideal? What are the classic elements which give uniqueness and distinction to American life?

First - <sup>the</sup> importance of the individual. Every man is possessed of certain inalienable rights. The state cannot veto them. No majority can abrogate them. All men, regardless of race and religion are equal before the law. Any attempt to subjugate the individual to the state or to discriminate against him in law because of race or creed, is a frontal and deadly attack upon the American Ideal.

Second - Government by consent and not by constraint; government from within and not from without. Dictatorship is government imposed from without. Democracy is government self-imposed from within. The American genius strives to achieve the best possible way of life for the largest possible number of citizens through their own voluntary enterprises, through free <sup>experimentation</sup> ~~expression~~, and step by step, through the evolutionary processes of trial and error. The American genius rejects all proffers of complete and ready-made millenniums at the spearpoint of revolution and dictatorship. It prefers the slower and less glamorous way of government, <sup>to</sup> But it <sup>also</sup> avoids all the horrors of government by purges and liquidations, by terrorism and expropriation, by espionage and slavery.

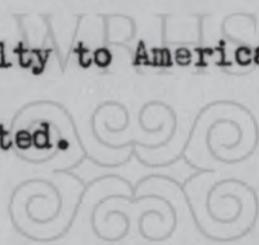
Third - <sup>the</sup> grace of tolerance. We are a composite people. Many races had a hand in the discovery, exploration, colonization and development of this great country. ~~The~~ Ours is a nation made up from its very inception entirely of immigrants. Our American life is a fine mosaic in which many separate race and religious attitudes are grouped into one noble pattern. Despite occasional lapses there has prevailed a wholesome attitude of good will, tolerance and cooperation ~~in~~ ~~is~~ among our people. The genius of America has manifested itself in steadily dissolving the hard concretion of groups and reducing them to their individual human components. Europe is concerned with the rights of minorities. America is concerned with the rights of men.

Those people, therefore, in our midst, who would break up American life into hostile racial or religious groups and who would persuade others to judge American

citizens not on the basis of individual worth, character or achievement, but on the basis of the race to which they belong, or the religion to which they subscribe, are the deadliest foes of the spirit, as well as the peace of the American people.

This true vision of American life should be kept undimmed in these darkening days. It is our sole hope for the future. It is our one chance to keep our dear country free from the ravages of the hates, bitternesses and conflicts which have disfigured the Old World. For the last twenty years, the desperate peoples of Europe have tried a way of life which is the very opposite of the American way of life - the suppression of the individual, government by ukase, <sup>edict</sup> and dictatorship, and race and religious intolerance - and it has led them, as inevitably it must, to the blood-soaked battlefields of war.

Let us not ~~fall~~ <sup>follow</sup> in their tragic footsteps. You, soldiers of America, who have given proof of your loyalty to America in war and in peace, help keep America free, clean, just, tolerant and united.



KEEP AMERICA FREE, JUST, TOLERANT, AND UNITED

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From the

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(small type)

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*Salv.* So let us try to think clearly and realistically in these difficult times.

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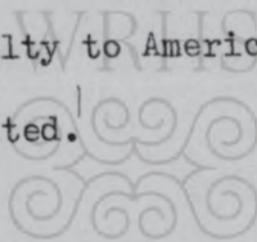
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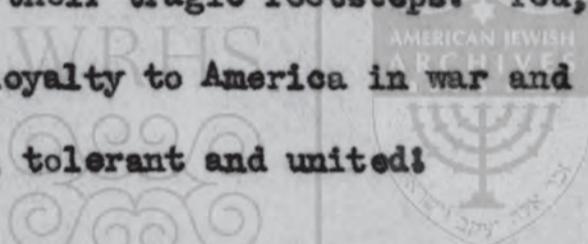
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*This address was delivered by Rabbi Silver before the National Legion Convention on Sept. 27, 1939.*

EDITOR.

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## HE IS AN AMERICAN!

He is an American.

He hears an airplane overhead, and if he looks up at all, does so in curiosity, neither in fear nor in the hope of seeing a protector.

His wife goes marketing, and her purchases are limited by her needs, her tastes, her budget, but not by decree.

He comes home of an evening through streets which are well lighted, not dimly in blue.

He reads his newspaper and knows that what it says is not concocted by a bureau, but an honest, untrammelled effort to present the truth.

He has never had a gas mask on.

He has never been in a bombproof shelter.

His military training, an R. O. T. C. course in college, he took because it excused him from the gym course, and it was not compulsory.

He belongs to such fraternal organizations and clubs as he wishes.

He adheres to a political party to the extent that he desires—the dominant one, if that be his choice, but with the distinct reservation that he may criticize any of its policies with all the vigor which to him seems proper—any other as his convictions dictate, even, if it be his decision, one which holds that the theory of government of the country is wrong and should be scrapped.

He does not believe, if his party is out of power, that the only way in which it can come into power is through a bloody revolution.

He converses with friends, even with chance acquaintances, expressing freely his opinion on any subject without fear.

He does not expect his mail to be opened between posting and receipt nor his telephone to be tapped.

He changes his place of dwelling and does not report so doing to the police.

He has not registered with the police.

He carries an identification card only in case he should be the victim of a traffic accident.

He thinks of his neighbors across international borders—of those to the north as though they were across a State line rather than as foreigners—of those to the south more as strangers, since they speak a language different from his, and with the knowledge that there are now matters of difference between his Government and theirs, but of neither with an expectancy of war.

He worships God in the fashion of his choice, without let.

His children are with him in his home, neither removed to a place of greater safety, if young, nor, if older, ordered ready to serve the state with sacrifice of limb or life.

He has his problems, his troubles, his uncertainties, but all others are not overshadowed by the imminence of battle and sudden death.

He should struggle to preserve his Americanism with its priceless privileges.

He is a fortunate man.

He is an American.

1/ Deeply grateful

2/ At no time - We need - calm - No time

3/ We all want - But men -

4/ War is it inevitable - Populace -  
We need never fear -  
It is doubtful -

5/ So let us -

Alone all - met -

There are those - Amer. Ideal -

6/ What is

First - ~~importance~~

Second - Govt. by consent -

Amer. genius - strives to achieve  
Repects - proper slaves

7/ Third - Grace & tolerance -

Confronte people

Many races - had have

Our nation - made up - mixtures

Despite occasional - provoked

Genius - manifested - despoling

Europe covered

8. Then people - break up - hostile

Permade - death for s.

9/ This Time V. Her - undressed  
- darkening days -

Sole Hope - one chance.

In last 20 yrs - desperate.

10) Let us not follow tragic  
you soldiers, most loyalty -  
help keep -

Free - clear - just - to travel  
vunks -











# ADDRESS

*Delivered by*

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WRHS



*at*



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OF AMERICAN LEGION

*in Chicago*

*on*

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I AM deeply grateful for this privilege of addressing this Convention. The American Legion was born in war and it now meets again in a world at war. But your dominant interest has, at all times, been not war but peace, and your chief concern has been not foreign affairs, but the preservation of American ideals and institutions at home.

At no time in the last twenty turbulent years has there been greater need for that sound and constructive policy which the American Legion has been pursuing than at present. We need today more than ever calm forthright and resolute thinking and action guided by only one principle: how best to safeguard and advance the highest interests and noblest traditions of our nation. This is no time for narrow partisanship, for irresponsible demagoguery, for self-proclaimed prophetic monopolists either of peace or righteousness, or for deceptive slogans and catch-words.

We all want peace. We all want America to stay out of this war. We shall all do our utmost to help keep America out of this war. We know the horrible toll and the criminal folly of war. But men of equal sincerity and loyalty can and do honestly differ as to the best means of achieving this end. Whether our present Neutrality laws are best calculated to keep us truly neutral and out of danger of involvement in this war, or whether a revision is necessary in order to keep a colossal and unmerited advantage from going to one of the belligerents, is a question concerning which there can be and is a sharp and honest division of opinion. Our chosen

representatives in Congress have been called upon to render a decision—a decision which will naturally be binding upon all of us. But it serves no good purpose and it is a distinct disservice to America to surround the discussion of this vital issue which requires the utmost of reasoned judgment, with hysteria, to attempt to stampede our legislators with organized tumult and uproar, and to brand as war-mongers all those who favor a revision of our Neutrality legislation.

Nor is it consistent with the facts, or a contribution to clear thinking or a service to humanity to popularize the idea that in the European struggle now raging, there are no basic issues involved with which the American people need be at all concerned, or that all belligerents are equally culpable, or that America stands to lose nothing if Hitlerism and Stalinism succeed in destroying the last few outposts of democracy and freedom in the Western World. We need never fear the invasion of our country by foreign armies, especially if we are strong enough in our military defenses. But if that political barbarism which has swept over Europe in recent years destroying one independent and free country after another, grossly violating the rights of minorities, scrapping all covenants and treaties, stamping out human freedom wherever it reaches, persecuting all religions, extolling militarism, force and conquest, and converting Europe first into an arsenal, and then into a battle field—if that political barbarism triumphs in this war, and France and England are defeated, and in turn fall prey to dictatorship, not its armies will invade our shores, but its doctrines;

and those subversive groups in our country which have worried us not a little in recent years will increase and multiply a thousand-fold, drawing strength and inspiration from the universal triumph of dictatorship abroad, and that will become not a potential, but an actual menace to our American democracy. It is doubtful whether in a world in which the last beacon of freedom will have been extinguished by the fierce winds of dictatorship, that our own torch of freedom can remain burning.

So, let us try to think clearly and realistically in these difficult times. Above all, let us in these days when nations are again meeting in the dread Valley of Decision, keep steadily before our eyes and before the eyes of our children, the clear vision of what America is and what we want America to remain. There are those in our midst who in the name of Americanism are destroying Americanism. There are those loud pseudo-champions of patriotism who are in reality the sinister purveyors of all forms of alienism in our midst. There are many men and groups in our land, some sincere but deluded victims of shrewd propaganda, others paid agents and spies of foreign governments, and still others who are just temperamental bigots and fanatics who are helping in one way or another, wittingly or unwittingly, to destroy the American Ideal.

What is this American Ideal? What are the classic elements which give uniqueness and distinction to American Life?

First—the importance of the individual. Every

man is possessed of certain inalienable rights. The state cannot veto them. No majority can abrogate them. All men, regardless of race and religion, are equal before the law. Any attempt to subjugate the individual to the State, or to discriminate against him in law because of race or creed is a frontal and deadly attack upon the American Ideal.

Second—government by consent and not by constraint; government from within and not from without. Dictatorship is government imposed from without. Democracy is government self-imposed from within. The American genius strives to achieve the best possible way of life for the largest possible number of citizens through their own voluntary enterprises, through free experimentation, and step by step through the evolutionary processes of trial and error. The American genius rejects all proffers of complete and ready-made millenniums at the spearpoint of revolution and dictatorship. It prefers the slower and less glamorous way of government. But it avoids all the horrors of government by purges and liquidations, by terrorism and expropriation, by espionage and slavery.

Third—the grace of tolerance. We are a composite people. Many races had a hand in the discovery, exploration, colonization and development of this great country. Ours is a nation made up from its very inception entirely of immigrants. Our American life is a fine mosaic in which many separate race and religious identities are grouped into one noble pattern. Despite occasional lapses, there has prevailed a

wholesome attitude of good will, tolerance and cooperation among our people. The genius of America has manifested itself in steadily dissolving the hard concretion of groups and reducing them to their individual human components. Europe is concerned with the rights of minorities. America is concerned with the rights of men.

Those people, therefore, in our midst who would break up American life into hostile racial or religious groups, and who would persuade others to judge American citizens not on the basis of individual worth, character or achievement, but on the basis of the race to which they belong, or the religion to which they subscribe, are the deadliest foes of the spirit as well as the peace of the American people.

This true vision of American life should be kept undimmed in these darkening days. It is our sole hope for the future. It is our one chance to keep our dear country free from the ravages of the hates, bitterness and conflicts which have disfigured the Old World. For the last twenty years the desperate people of Europe have tried a way of life which is the very opposite of the American way of life—the suppression of the individual, government by ukase and dictatorship, and race and religious intolerance—and it has led them, as inevitably it does, to the blood-soaked battlefields of war.

Let us not follow in their tragic footsteps. You, soldiers of America, who have given proof of your loyalty to America in war and in peace, help keep America free, clean, just, tolerant and united!