



## Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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What Now? Some Thoughts on America After the Election, 1968.



What Now? - Some Thoughts On America After the Elections  
Daniel Jeremy Silver  
November 3, 1968

A long and expensive campaign draws to a close and each of us will judge Tuesday night whether it has all been worth it. When you make that judgment remember that we could have built 100 public schools, 20 major hospitals or complete universities for the cost of these campaigns. In this spirit may I read you a simple, but delightful, poem by one Judith Viorst called "The Election."

Last Wednesday night  
After the coffee and Danish  
My cousin's club came out for Hubert Humphrey  
McGraw says that he is actually a very kind person  
with a kind heart and it is better for the Jews  
I said, that is good to know.  
Thursday morning the man from diaper service  
80 diapers and a Wallace button  
Wxplained that he and George were opposed to Treason,  
rape and murder.  
Hoped I was also.

As the election progressed most of us found our positions. We know that we are going to vote. We will vote not only for a personality, but a party. Despite the overlays of Madison Avenue it has become increasingly clear that both the candidates do have personalities and positions in the major fiscal, welfare and international positions. Each of us have made judgements about these positions and I think it is increasingly clear that whoever wins there are going to be changes. Not only are the two candidates different from each other and the parties distinguishable, but in January there will be a new administration with new faces, new outlooks, new hopes and new plans. But what now? What lies ahead?



I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet. " I am not a Jeanne Dixon, thank God. I think it must be a terrible fate to spend one's life looking into a crystal ball and seeing there only the reflection of one's own greed for status or fame or wealth. I don't hear little voices from outer space or inner space. I am a rabbi. I preach tradition. My tradition tells me that the future is an open book, a series of blank pages. It has not yet been written. Whether January represents the dawn of a new day or the lengthening shadows of a deeper darkness is not yet decided. The future will depend upon the wisdom and the will of a new administration and of the American people. And so I have come this morning, not so much to prophesy, which is a fool's undertaking, but to plead for a certain quality of mind, a more sober judgement, a more somber vision, which I think the American people and our leaders desperately need at this strange, confused turn in our history.

Let me illustrate what I want to state by beginning with a story. The story is told of Helm. Once Warsaw was the center of the intellectual Yiddish and Jewish world of Eastern Europe. There was a great theater in Warsaw. Plays which were successful were sent out to tour the provinces, except the traveling companies went to Lodz, Vilnow, Krakow and to Helm. The audiences in Helm were known for laughing in the wrong places, for always applauding just before the heroine began her soliloquy. The actors began to satirize the audiences of Helm much as American comedians satirize New Haven or Des Moines. Helm became that place in Jewish folklore which was the fount of folly. The story was told that when the stork brought children to the world, flew over Helm, a rip developed on the bag carrying fools. Ever since, Helm has been populated by a full complement of simple-mindedness and stupidity.



To understand this story about Helm you must understand its geography. I am told that Helm sits in a valley and you approach it by only one road, a rather narrow road, which winds round and round up and down a high mountain. This road was apparently a rather dangerous walk. One particular year the drayman who brought the supply of yard goods which the women of Helm had ordered from Warsaw so that the women could make dresses for the holidays got caught in a storm on this road. His mule stumbled and the mule, rider and the dresses all fell down the cliff. A few days later the milkman, carrying his cannisters on a wooden yoke, slipped and he, too, spilled milk, the cannisters and the milkman fell down the cliff. That same month the postman carrying the mail to Helm from the railroad slipped and fell and went rolling down the mountainside. Here was a crisis which cried out for solution. The people of Helm assembled and debated for six days and six nights about this narrow road and the dangerous path. Finally, they came to a decision. They decided to build a hospital at the base of the cliff.

As I listened to much of the oratory of this campaign and much of that violent enthusiasm which this oratory incredibly elicited. I found myself comparing these words to the debates held in Helm. We, too, have very serious problems. There is a problem of crime and there is a problem of delinquency. What do we do? Do we build safety guards or widen the road? No. We talk about increasing the police force and making the courts instruments of civic vengeance. We have a problem of radical dissent. So what do we do? We talk about mace and about police dogs and repression. We are always somehow building hospitals at the bottom of the cliff rather than repairing the road, that is, the social order.



I asked myself why? What is there that is similar in Helm and in America? Are we really so foolish? Some of us are fools. Some of us are stupid. Some of the chants that have been raised during this election are incredibly ignorant and could have been sung only with their blood and mistake for wisdom. If we really are concerned with the problems of poverty, blight, disillusioned youth, the alienated poor, the alienated black who in his right mind could conceive that a first-aid station, police with batons, police with electric prods, any number of police, can solve the problems which are before us? I hope from the slippage of votes in Mr. Wallace's column that at least some have begun to recognize the folly of voting prejudice and repression. What disturbs me most is not that there are Helmniks in the south of the United States, but that many well-intentioned middle class Americans are not ready to look to reasonable remedies. Rather, they want instant solutions, cheap solutions. There are no instant solutions. There are no solutions which do not have the high price tag attached to them.

Let me illustrate what I mean. In this state we have a governor who has made himself somewhat of a prophet. He has gone about the country saying that the whole welfare apparatus is a costly failure. What is his solution? Build a few vocational schools and additional classrooms. Jobs will be found in the private sector for all these who are not now working. He suggests to those of us who work long hours and hard that those on public subsistence are shiftless ne'er-do-wells who ought to be prodded. Why should our hard-earned taxes allow them to loaf through life? At first glance Mr. Rhodes's speeches seem reasonable enough. Give the children the right kind of education. Provide the men enough jobs and we can dismantle the welfare apparatus. Our taxes will go down. The future will be cozy. The only problem with this solution is that it is no solution at all.



In the first place, what school can guarantee that its graduates are prepared for life? We tend to think of the dropout as someone who fails to graduate from high school. What family does not have a dropout? Somebody who comes from a good home, from a school system which had every dollar it required for quality education, where the class sizes were small, who simply would not buckle down to work and did not get through. We carried him along for a year or two or three. We told him to go join the army or go to New York for a few years until he finds himself. Yes, it is true that there are families which have been on welfare for three, four or five generations; but it is equally true that the vast majority, 99 out of every 100 families who are on welfare are there for less than six months, and most are never there again. Furthermore, 80% of those receiving public assistance are not able-bodied men. They are the aged, women with young children, the blind, the mentally ill, the institutionalized. No amount of hiring by General Motors or Ford is going to take these people off the public assistance roles.

I have heard a lot of loose talk during this campaign about the failure of our social welfare system. I have heard it said our social welfare system is inadequately financed. This is true. I have also heard it said that it is a bankrupt system, which cannot work. I am not convinced. A nation which prides itself on being just and caring for the unfortunate must provide them with the necessities of life. We can change the forms of the system. We can provide a negative income tax or guaranteed annual wage instead of a monthly dole. But there is no way on God's earth to provide decency for all without financing a welfare apparatus and to a degree far beyond that which we finance it today.



The simple truth is: if the American people are committed to social welfare and a just society, to the care of the lame, the blind, the widowed and the poor, with the improvement of life in the slum and in the ghetto, then we are going to have to spend annually not less but perhaps 80 and a 100 billion dollars more than we now budget. President Johnson's Commission on Civil Disorder, the Kerner Commission, made, as you recall, a number of important recommendations towards the reconditioning of housing and the slums, the development of recreational areas, improvement of the school system, upgrading of the police and the like. They failed, perhaps fearing to shock, to put dollar signs after each of these programs. Some social workers have done so. The dollar signs are staggering. The Kerner Commission recommendations would require commitment of over 100 billion dollars a year. Where will this money be found? It can be found only in one place, in our pay checks. Will we pay it? I don't know. We somehow always find the money to pay for war, but when it comes to paying for human rehabilitation rather than human destruction we become penurious and fight every increase in tax millage.

One other statement ought to be made. Americans believe in problem solving. Something like the space race is right up our alley. We are a nation born to the industrial age. Our greatness lies in our ability to see a problem, develop a mass attack on it; throw in enough engineers, scientists and enough money to research a solution and then implement that solution. If it is a matter of design and construction the engineers and money can put a man on the moon. But the human race does not operate the way the space race does. There are no guarantees that even if we spend something on the order of a 100 billion dollars a year for social welfare programming, for better schools and better medicine, and better recreation



and better services in the city and for human rehabilitation, we will, in fact, solve the problems of our cities. Conditions will improve, but in life there are no final solutions. Every one of our families has a cousin, an uncle, who hasn't worked for thirty years. If he isn't on public welfare we provide his welfare. He had a good education. He came from a fine Jewish home. He had all the same industrious motivation we had, but there was something in his genes and psychological makeup. He just wasn't about to work. There are some people you are not going to be able to force to work, however much you retrain them and however much you rehabilitate them and no matter how many job opportunities you offer them or how much you complain and threaten them. They are simply not working kinds of human beings. It is about time that we accepted the complexity of people. Not every child who receives a standard education will benefit by it. Not every adult can be made a part of our capitalist work force. We are not things on a production line. We are human beings, for a better or for worse idiosyncratic, individual, different, each of us from the other. This is not to say that social legislation will not make an impact. It can have tremendous impact. In the last sixty years the social legislation in the United States has helped to reduce the number of those who live below poverty from 30% of the population to 15%.

Think of what we could do by simply changing the environment in which children are being raised, if we had enough money to rehabilitate Glenville, Hough and the other slums of this city, if we had enough money to cut down the class sizes in the Cleveland public schools from 39 to 21 or 19, if we had enough money to provide adequate courts and adequate lawyers and true due process, if we had enough money to bring counselors and competent social work people in sufficient numbers into the field. But there are no guarantees. There will always be those



who can point failures, and there will be failures, and who will say: "Aha! The system doesn't work!" Here is the proof. The system will have many failures. And the system will be terribly costly. It costs more to retrain one 18 or 19 year-old in a job opportunity center than it does to send another 19-year old to Harvard. Shall the money not be spent? It must be spent? How much will it cost to keep this young person in jails and to chase him down for his various crimes? But let us not delude ourselves that we can solve the problems of our citizens. We will improve the city. We will improve the amenities of American life, but there will be violence, there will be poverty, there will be emotional disease. There will be many evidences of social failure, but we must push ahead regardless. I am suggesting that a fragile optimism is not the best spirit with which to enlist in a war on poverty. Human problems simply cannot be solved the same that mathematical problems can. Whatever we do we can't make all human beings into saints. We can't make all children over in our own image. We can't guarantee success when we deal with men. We must be prepared for frustration and hold to a sober and not easily discouraged.

I look ahead towards the next few years, I plead with myself and my country that we maintain the grand vision and a sober realism. We can improve the nation, but we cannot bring permanent abundance and pure domestic tranquility. And yet, to move it in the right direction, surely that is enough. He who saves a single life it is accounted to Him as if he saved the world.



What is true on the domestic scene is equally true on the international scene. Halloween night the President of the United States spoke to us. He told us of his decision to stop the bombing of North Vietnam. He spoke of the possibility of a National Liberation Front, joining with Hanoi the Paris Peace Conferences. To his credit he did not promise us instant results. His mind seemed to dwell on Panmunjon, the three years of acrimonious, often vitriolic war accompanied debate, which preceded the Korean armistice. I confess that my mind considered also the continuing infiltration of South Korea by North Korea and our own overflights and the Pueblo. There is no peace which is fully stable. All that we can ever hope for, really, in a world such as ours, is that little by little we manage to lower the level of violence and built into each nation sufficiency, opportunity, prosperity, so that when men desire what another has there is the ever present fear that in the grabbing we will lose something we now have which is precious.

A new administration will take office, certain that it will face crisis after crisis after crisis. The crisis of class war is still with us in many parts of the world. The crisis of racial war threatens many parts of the world. Governments which are authoritarian are being subjected to revolution from below. Governments which are moderate are being radicalized on all sides. Ancient tensions in the Middle East, Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America are being exacerbated. We cannot look forward to a time of blossoming peace and growing security. What can we look forward to? What should we expect of the new administration? Largely this - a willingness to deal with the complicated political and international problems of our world in such a way that we are moving away



from brinkmanship and confrontation and purely military solutions towards negotiation, diplomacy and peaceful cooperation. Better guerilla warfare than open warfare. Better political attack than military attack. Better fruitless negotiations than no negotiations at all. This is the kind of world we live in. Would it were otherwise, but it is not.

If we are looking for a messiah we will be disappointed. There are no wars any longer which can be won. There are no peace treaties any longer which are that secure. There will always be among us those who will fault the wars which cannot be won and peace treaties which cannot be held stable, who hold that Versailles, Yalta and Geneva were sellout conferences. That is not true. Potsdam and Geneva merely represent the volatile, angry, bitter world in which we live.

What can we expect of the new administration? That they will think first of sending in the Peace Corps before they send in the Marine Corps; that they will not accept the proposition that foreign aid is evil, bankrupt, and use some evidence of misappropriation to cancel the sharing of our substance with the poor, sharing our affluence and food, building factories, establishing better agriculture. Such service, however it is managed or organized, is the only real service in the cause of peace which we can, in fact, manage.

In our world today the rich nations, the powerful nations, are moving up the ladder of power and progress at a rapid pace. The overpopulated and impoverished nations are becoming ever more impoverished. Unless we find some way of closing this gap between the have's and have-not's there is bound to be war, a world-wide violence which no one can contain. When you have nothing in your belly and nothing in your soul what have you to lose?

So I pray that the new administration will prefer to send teachers rather



than tanks, seed rather than supersonic planes, factories rather than fire-power. I hope that none of us will demand swift solutions to any of the problems that face the world. They are simply not available.

Quick military solutions got us into Vietnam. That is precisely the way we got into Thailand. It is precisely the way we originally got into Korea. That is precisely the way we will get into any number of dangerous entanglements unless we stop short now and recognize the limitations of American power, the limited and legitimate spheres of American power, the dangers of military solutions and the limitations of military solutions, the limitations of economic solutions and their essential hopefulness. There will be others who will agree that we ought not take the military road, but counsel us to take the isolationist road. Their quick solution is to turn America in on herself. America feels herself virtuous. We have tried to do good by the world and the world has spurned us. We can't do it. A globe which can be girdled in less than an hour by a missile flying at supersonic speeds cannot turn in on herself. There are those, Europe, Middle East and Asia who depend on our economic and political interest and power for their security. There are no quick solutions. There are no complete solutions. Beware of those who promise them to you.

It is going to be a very costly world for us to live in. We were born at a time when the frontier was still open, when Americans felt opportunity, when there was much for everyone and more than many needed. That period is coming to an end. Today the need is for citizenship, for sharing, for spending, for the



common good. Perhaps this is for the best. Certainly it is as it has generally been. When I look back at our tradition and I look for the language and the vocabulary by which our tradition has described responsibility to us, I find few of the vaulting, graceful, happy, innocent images of the past hundred years; that life is to be enjoyed, that life is to be gulped down, that life is a dance and all that you need is to take advantage of it. Rather the tradition speaks of the yoke of the kingdom of God, the yoke of obligation. Man is a beast of burden. Man is yoked to the plow and we remain burdened by our obligations until we grow old and some young person puts his neck and his shoulder to our work.

It is not up to you to complete the work, but neither can you desist from taking part in it. I have not painted a very happy or gay picture. Such a picture cannot honestly be painted. Americans who would like to go on flitting about from indulgence to indulgence are bound to be disappointed. If they insist upon their special privileges they will destroy the nation which is struggling for them. The America which we will know in the years ahead should be graceful in its opportunities for learning, cultural experience and family, but her abundance will have to be shared much more equitably and broadly for unless we commit ourselves in the largest measure to the needs of the poor and the oppressed and dispossessed here and abroad, who now have the fire power and the mobile power, they will not take out their anger on their own but on us. No longer can a society be satisfied to say to its poor, wait another day. They want their opportunity now. That society



will not be stable unless it allows a sufficient number of these people to move into the mainstream, to move into the field of opportunity which we all enjoy.

Are there guaranteed solutions? I doubt it. Are there expensive therapies, treatments? There are and they must be taken, taken with the sober realization that once we have spent the money we will still have problems though they may be of a different order and a different nature, taken because we are committed to justice, taken because the larger wisdom is to solve the problems of today, leave to our children in their wisdom the problems of their day.





What now?

I'm not a Jewish Boy - factually - the movement calls to  
spread my life along the reflexes of my own mind - a spiritual growth.  
I'm not a prophet - I know these things well enough -  
I don't know what is my role - a new community will be built  
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its purpose is also blank - it's only a starting - which  
we will begin in our days as we can see it  
clear.

I come not to prophecy but to present the new truth and of  
the present is not just at any time considered or not  
yet, but 2 new to us and we will be introduced to  
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No. 1 - Continued on 2 pages number of the book



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VNH/ 1950

Bordeaux





# Kaddish

Friday

Nov 1

Sunday

3

## Those who passed away this week

JULIUS GOLD  
NICHOLAS M. GOODMAN  
GERTRUDE HANDEL  
EUGENE ROSENBAUM

## Yahrzeits

DAVID E. RICH  
RACHEL MILLER ELLBOGEN  
JACOB H. ALTMAN  
COLEMAN SPITZ  
HEDWIG HENRY  
BECKY ROSENTHAL  
SIMON FOX  
EDWIN H. WEIL  
PAULINE WEINSTEIN LOCKWOOD  
MARY O. SHAPERO  
JEAN YOELSON LEVIN  
JOSEPH W. SCHIFFER  
RABBI MOSES J. GRIES  
EDITH G. ZEMAN  
MAX PAUL MEYER  
HARRY D. KOBLITZ  
BERTHA HAYS EISENMAN  
MAURICE E. KESSLER  
GEORGE H. COHEN  
NATHAN R. CORNSWEET  
NORA STERN LOEB  
THERESA SENOR  
EMMA REISZ  
JOSEPH EDWARD STONE

Chavinson

DORA CHAVINSON

DORA HENKIN

MORRIS LEVIN

PROFESSOR MAX MORRIS

LEWIS A. KOHN

ARCHIVES



Accent 2nd syllable





# The Election

By Judith Viorst

Last Wednesday night,  
After the coffee and danish,  
The Cousins Club came out for Hubert Humphrey  
On the grounds that he is actually a very nice person,  
With a kind heart,  
And it's better for the Jews.

I said that's good to know.

Thursday morning the man from diaper service  
Arrived with eighty diapers and a Wallace button,  
Explaining that he and George were opposed to treason, rape,  
and murder,  
And hoped I was also.

I said I'd think about it.

On Friday the baby sitter,  
Who calls Negroes black people and says things like up against  
the wall,  
Warned us to get out of the establishment bag and vote for  
Eldridge Cleaver,  
Who knows where it's at, tells it like it is, gets right down  
to the nitty gritty, and  
Blood is going to flow in the streets.

I said we'd skip the movie.

Saturday afternoon at Bloomingdale's,  
While I was deciding between the purple satin harem pants and  
a machine-washable housecoat,  
The salesgirl decided Nixon was the one,  
Because she liked the parts about the boy with the dream and  
the trains whistling in the night and winning it for Ike.

I said I'd take the housecoat.

Sunday my son informed me  
That the entire second grade  
Had selected Pigasus the pig,  
Having learned from the science teacher  
That pigs are not as stupid  
As they look.

I said science is wonderful.

Monday, after dinner,  
Our friends from the Village,  
The ones with so much integrity they won't eat grapes,  
Dropped by with Alice's Restaurant and I.F. Stone's Weekly,  
To tell us don't vote.

I said I respected their position.  
They said they respected mine.

I wish I had one.

