

Religious Myths & Visions of America: Ten Faith Perspectives on America's World Role

Christopher Buck, PhD, JD



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Green Lake Bahá'í Conference

Workshop Sessions II & III

10:45 a.m. & 2:15 p.m.

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Green Lake, WI 54941

Chapter 1

Nation & Notion

CHRISTOPHER BUCK is a Pennsylvania attorney and independent scholar who has taught at Michigan State University, Quincy University, Millikin University, and Carleton University. His publications include *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*, *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith*, *Symbol and Secret: Qur'an Commentary in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Iqán*, as well as a number of book chapters, journal articles, and encyclopedia articles.

"*Religious Myths and Visions of America* is an intellectual feast, sparkling with original interpretations of how many religions have helped shape America's national character, from the Iroquois origin story, to Christian, Mormon, Bahá'í, and Black Muslim beliefs, among others. This book will provoke insights and controversy for years to come."

—Bruce E. Johansen
University of Nebraska at Omaha

"On the premise that America is both 'nation and notion,' this project is a breath of methodological fresh air. *Religious Myths and Visions of America* is a novel, imaginative, and rigorously scholarly contribution to comparative religion, worthy of serious attention and debate."

—Todd Lawson
University of Toronto

"Christopher Buck's new book is a timely and highly readable consideration of the way American religions have continued to remythologize the country. He offers impressive research and notable facility in the comparative study of myth, while presenting the material in an entirely accessible, lucid, and interesting manner. Few topics are more relevant today, at a time when the self-definition of Americans is such an influential force on the global stage."

—William E. Paden
University of Vermont



"This is an ambitious and unique work, covering a broad range of religious visions of America in their global context. Buck's firm theoretical framework and rigorous documentation make this a significant contribution to contemporary discussions of the place, role, and future of the diversity of religions that make up America today."

—Andrew Rippin
University of Victoria, Canada

"For those who have yearned for a more readable and scholarly work on the multifaceted ways in which minorities have 'redefined America's world role,' Christopher Buck's book is a welcome addition to the fields of racial, cultural, and ethnic studies. Using myths and visions of minority faiths, Buck has introduced an engaging and fresh new approach to understanding and appreciating the influence of these faiths on America's role in the world. He keeps the reader engaged and intrigued in a study that reads like a good novel by a warm fire on a cold winter evening."

—Richard W. Thomas
Michigan State University

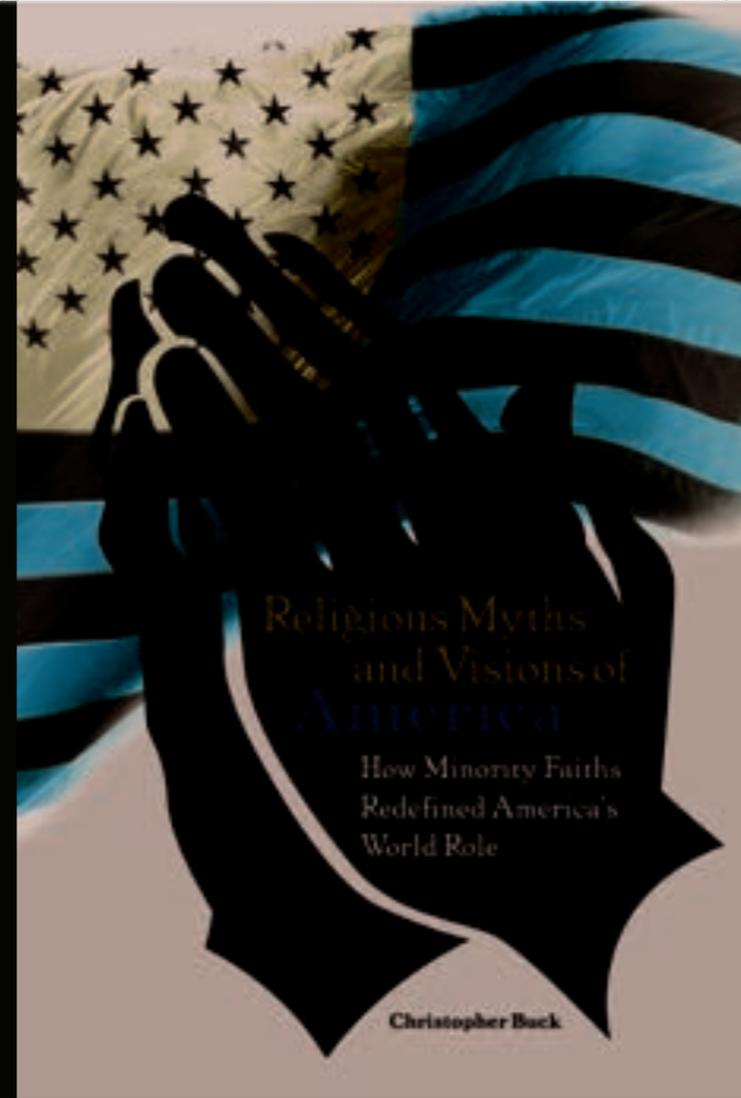
"In this remarkable book, Dr. Buck examines the key religious ideas that have shaped America's idea of itself. It's a broadly informed and beautifully written work that reveals the various strains in American mythology and religion. I can think of no subject in American studies more central to our national psyche. This is an important, interesting, thought-provoking work."

—Jay Parini
Middlebury College

Buck

America

PRAEGER



America

Christopher Buck

At the heart of American studies is the idea of America itself. Here, Buck looks at the religious significance of America by examining those religions that have attached some kind of spiritual meaning to America. The author explores how American Protestantism and nine minority faiths have projected America into the mainstream of world history by defining—and redefining—America's world role. Surveying the religious myths and visions of America relative to these ten religions, Buck shows how minority faiths have redefined America's sense of national purpose.

Religious myths of America are thought-orienting narratives that serve as vehicles of spiritual and social truths about the United States itself. Religious visions of America are action-oriented agendas that articulate the goals to which America should aspire and the role it should play in the community of nations. Buck examines the distinctive perspectives held by ten religious traditions that inform and expand on the notion of America and its place in the world. He covers Native American, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, Christian Identity, Black Muslim, Islamic, Buddhist, and Bahá'í beliefs and invites serious reflection on what it means to be an American, particularly from a religious perspective.



University of Vermont
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PRAEGER

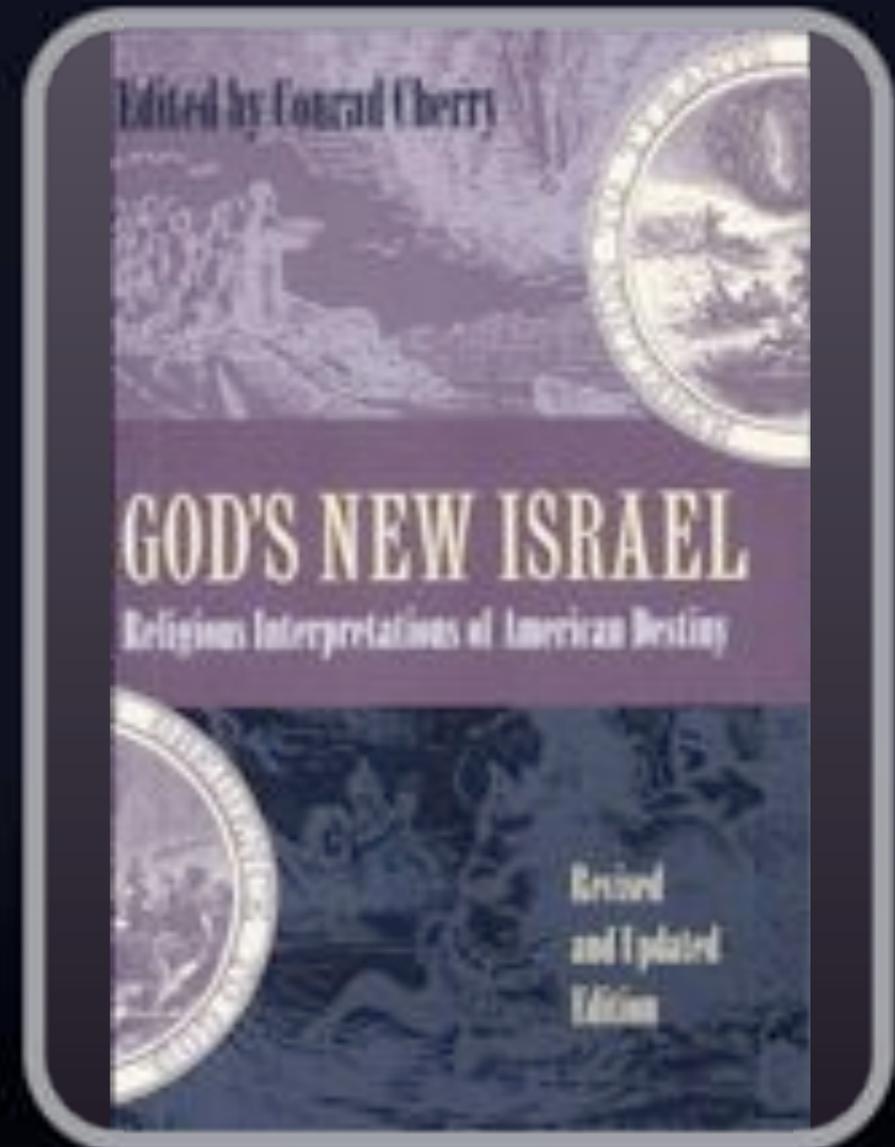
America



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America: Nation & Notion

- “Nations provoke fantasy.” — Lauren Gail Berlant (1991)
- “America is not a geographic so much as a visionary concept and entity.” — Kevin Lewis (1999)
- “Any vital myth does not hide in the hinterland of a “realm of ideas” but impinges upon the life of a people as a spring of their action. To give serious attention to the myth of American destiny in its various forms is to heed the concrete courses of action that are excited by it and that in turn affect it.”
— Conrad Cherry (1998)
- This book is about an unusual religious topic: the United States of America (“America”), past and present.
- “America” is, at once, nation and notion, country and creed, republic and rhetoric, entity and ideology, sovereignty and salience. The present volume treats the relationship of the supernatural world to the world’s superpower.



“... the single most valuable collection of primary materials available on American civil religion”

Religious Myths & Visions of America Defined

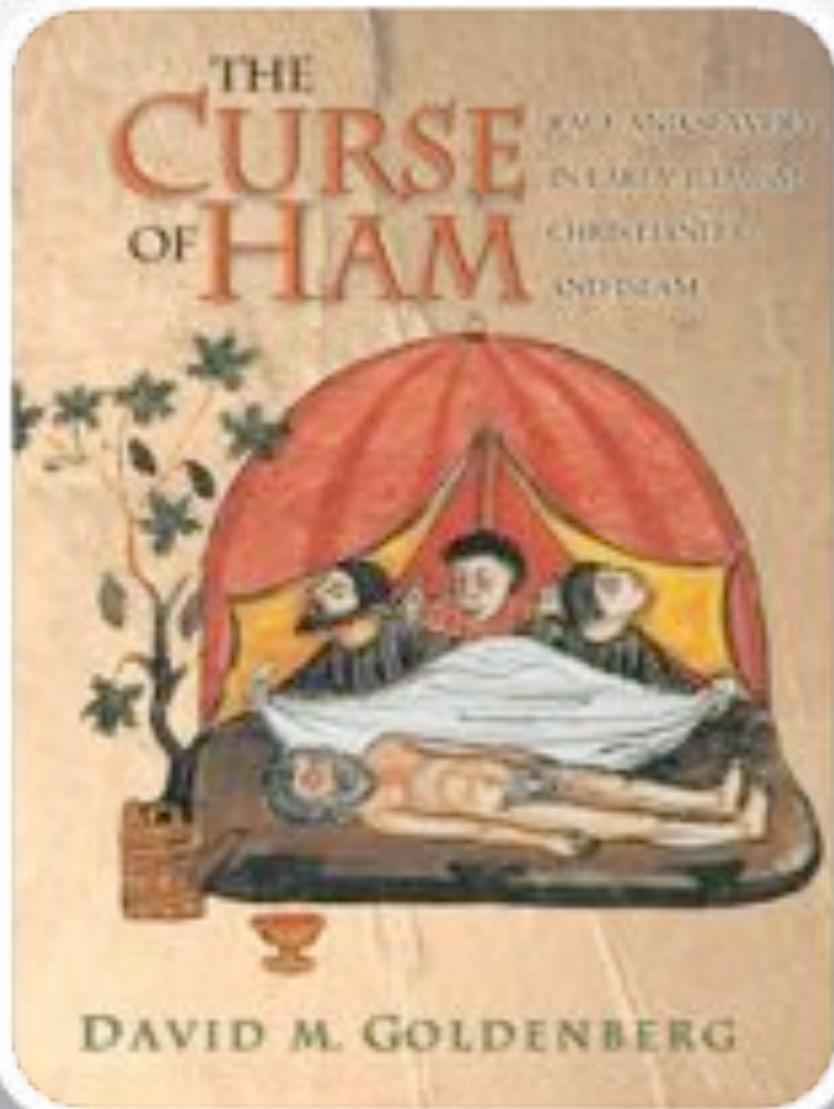
- When a story is told, a truth is told. A narrative that is descriptive in form may be prescriptive in function.
- A “religious myth of America” is an “idealized narrative exemplifying key precepts and practices.”
- These myths are thought-orienting, whereas visions of America are typically action-orienting.



“Progress of America”

by Domenico Tojetti (1875)

Racial Myths & Visions of America

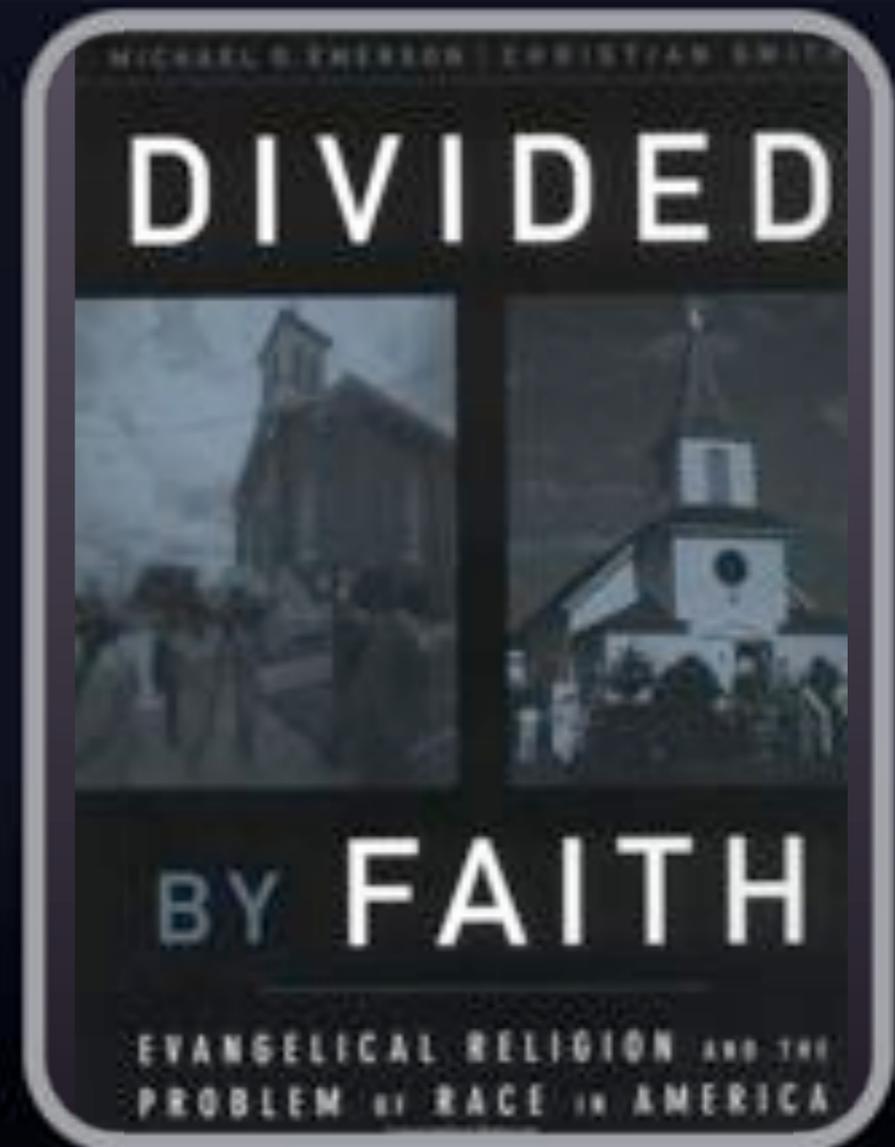


- Perhaps the most salient theme among these minority myths of America is that of race.
- In a sense, this was already predicted by David Wills, who has suggested that the “central themes” of American religious history are pluralism, Puritanism, and the encounter of black and white.
- Note the prior encounter of red and white.
- According to Paul Harvey, Christianity was a major catalyst in racializing America: “Christianity necessarily was central to the process of racializing peoples—imposing categories of racial hierarchies upon groups of humanity or other societies.”



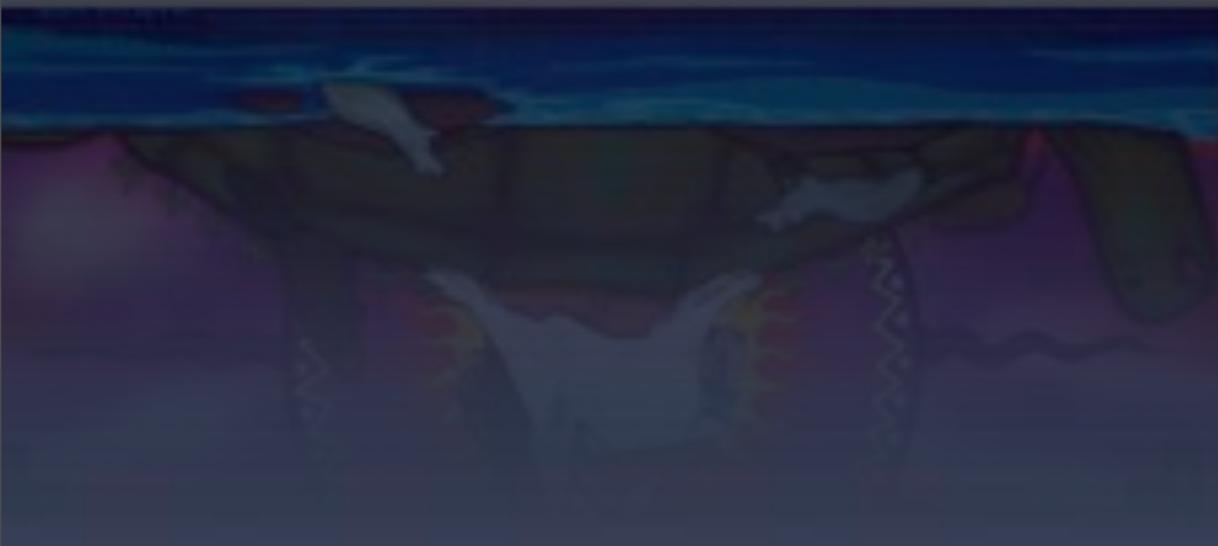
Operative Hypothesis

- “As minority faiths strove to understand the meaning of America and their place in it,” writes James Moorhead, “minority faiths themselves played no small part in the weakening of white Protestant hegemony. Their creativity in adapting and reinterpreting the symbols of American destiny broadened the framework of discourse within which citizens explained national identity.”
- Over the course of American history, religious myths and visions of America tend to reflect an ever-changing American civil society, whether as a function of its social evolution or as a catalyst of it.
- In the survey of religions undertaken in this book, the following operative hypothesis may be tested:
 - Religions remythologize America.
 - And further: Religions re-envision America.



Chapter 2

Native American Myths & Visions of America



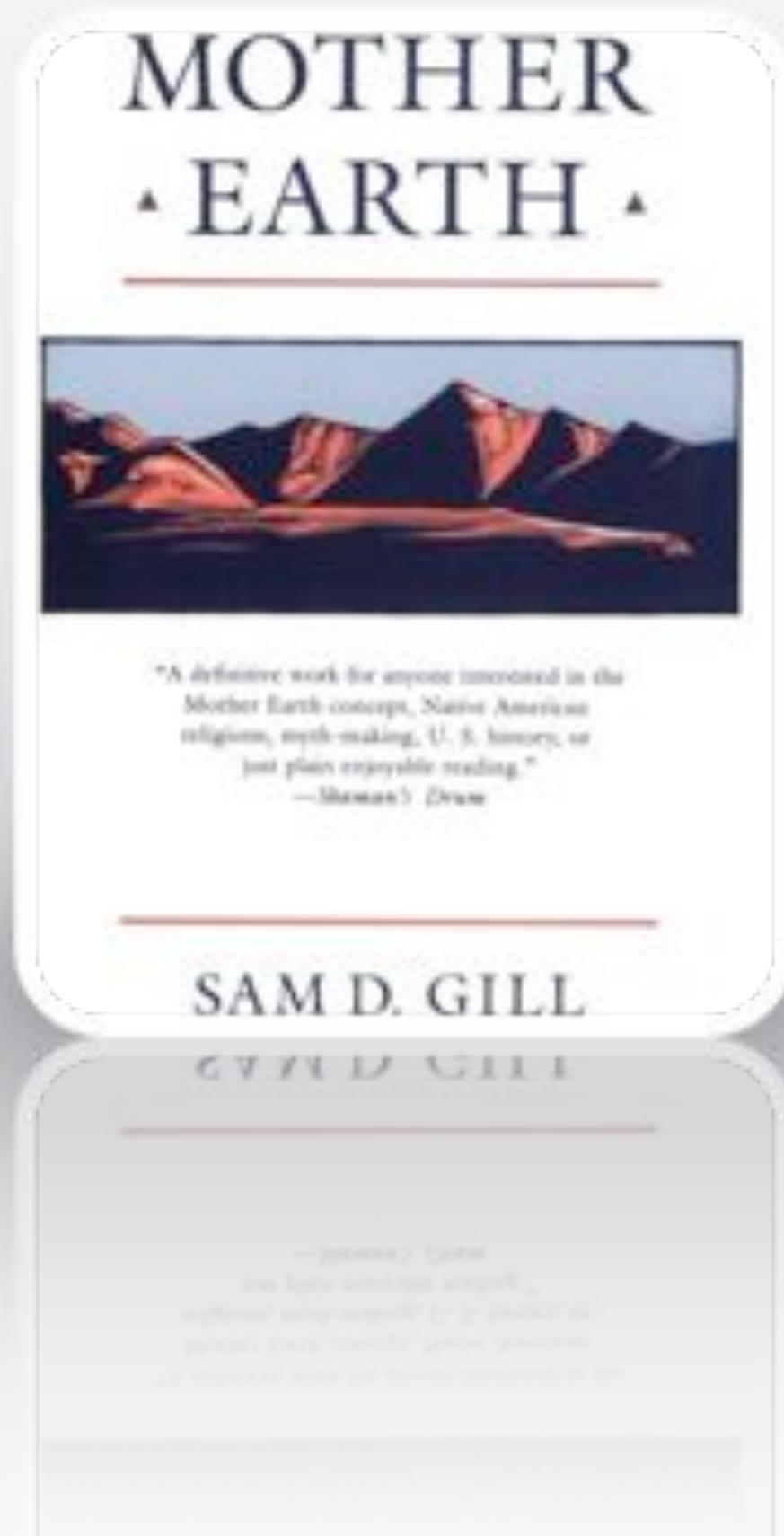
The Turtle Island Myth



Thomas Jefferson

- On January 10, 1802, Thomas Jefferson told a delegation of Wyandot, Ottawa, Chippewa, Powtewatamie, and Shawanese chiefs: “Your blood will mix with ours, and will spread, with ours, over this great island.”
- As part of “the Earth Diver Creation” myth (particularly in the Iroquois version), land is first formed from a mere handful of mud taken from the ocean floor by a heroic animal spirit that must dive to great depths for it.
- After the animal spirit succeeds in extracting this mud from the sea bed, the sediment itself is transformed into an island—land that emerges from the primordial deep.

The Myth of “Mother Earth”



- “Mother Earth” embodies what might be called a “gospel of environmentalism.”
- “Mother Earth” is not a person but a symbol.
- It is a myth without a story—and more metaphor than myth.
- The myth of Mother Earth is not ancient, but modern.
- It appears to be largely a relatively recent invention promulgated by scholars, popularized by the American press, and further promoted by Native Americans themselves.
- Anthropologist Sam D. Gill searched over 1,300 ethnographic records, and found only three sources for a Native American belief in a Mother Earth goddess.
- “It seems that Mother Earth as a major goddess of the Indians of North America is a reality, but that she has become so only during the twentieth century.”
- Thus “Mother Earth” is more of a myth about Native Americans than it is a myth by Native Americans.

The Deganawidah Legend

- Huron by birth and Mohawk by adoption, Deganawidah was a prophet, statesman, and lawgiver who, along with his cohort and spokesman, Hiawatha, established the Iroquois “League of People of the Longhouse” (Haudenosaunee), also known as the “Great League of Peace” (Kaianerekowa). (c. 1450)
- The Iroquois “League of Nations” united the Mohawks, Onondagas, Senecas, Oneidas, and Cayugas. In 1714, the Tuscaroras were adopted and, in 1753, the Nanticokes and Tuteloes were incorporated, expanding the League into eight Nations. There is evidence that the Saponi and Conoy Nations were added later, enlarging the League into ten Nations—with the Delawares being given Iroquois protection, but without formal adoption.

“Thadodaho has not yet had the snakes combed from his hair; Deganawida, said some to stammer, stands behind Hiawatha who serves as his speaker.”



Illustration excerpted Henry R. Schoolcraft, History, Condition and Prospects of the Iroquois Tribes of the United States, Part 1 (Philadelphia, 1853)

The Peacemaker's Teachings

- Thereupon Tekanawita [Deganawidah] stood up in the center of the gathering place, and then he said: First I will answer what it means to say, “Now it is arriving, the Good Message.” This, indeed, is what it means: When it stops, the slaughter of your own people who live here on earth, then everywhere peace will come about, by day and also by night, and it will come about that as one travels around, everyone will be related . . .
- Now again [?], secondly I say, “Now it is arriving, the Power,” and this means that the different nations, all of the nations, will become just a single one, and the Great Law will come into being, so that all now will be related to each other, and there will come to be just a single family, and in the future, in days to come, this family will continue on.
- Now in turn, the other, my third saying, “Now it is arriving, the Peace,” this means that everyone will become related, men and also women, and also the young people and the children, and when all are relatives, every nation, then there will be peace. . . . Then there will be truthfulness, and they will uphold hope and charity, so that it is peace that will unite all of the people, indeed, it will be as though they have but one mind, and they are a single person with only one body and one head and one life, which means that there will be unity. . . .
- When they are functioning, the Good Message and also the Power and the Peace, these will be the principal things everybody will live by; these will be the great values among the people.

The Iroquois Influence Thesis: Myth or History?

- In 1751, Benjamin Franklin wrote to James Parker, his New York City printing partner, with this comment on the Iroquois League:
- *It would be a very strange Thing, if six Nations of Ignorant Savages should be capable of forming a Scheme for such an Union, and be able to execute it in such a Manner, as that it has subsisted Ages, and appears indissoluble; and yet that a like Union should be impracticable for ten or a Dozen English Colonies, to whom it is more necessary, and must be more advantageous; and who cannot be supposed to want an equal Understanding of their Interests.*
- By voice vote, the Senate agreed to H.Con.Res. 331 on October 21, 1988. That resolution reads, in part:
- *Whereas the original framers of the Constitution, including, most notably, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, are known to have greatly admired the concepts of the six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy; Whereas, the Confederation of the original Thirteen Colonies into one republic was influenced by the political system developed by the Iroquois Confederacy as were many of the democratic principles which were incorporated into the Constitution itself; . . . Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That— (1) the Congress, on the occasion of the two hundredth anniversary of the signing of the United States Constitution, acknowledges the contribution made by the Iroquois Confederacy and other Indian Nations to the formation and development of the United States.*

Chapter 3

Protestant Myths & Visions of America

**Political cartoon
portraying the
Democratic Party
candidate Cass as
a cannon.**



**In his hand is a
sword labeled
"Manifest
Destiny."
(New York, 1848)**



The Puritan Myth of America



John Winthrop

- Circa 1630, John Winthrop (1588–1649), appointed governor of the Company of the Massachusetts Bay, in a sermon (“A Modell of Christian Charity”) on the Arbella, in its voyage from England to America, famously said:
- “For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.”
- “The principal conceptual metaphors can be clustered under a ‘master metaphor’: **THE SETTLEMENT OF AMERICA IS THE MOVEMENT OF THE JEWS FROM EGYPT TO ISRAEL.**”
- “This master metaphor can be broken down into three basic submetaphors—**AMERICA IS THE PROMISED LAND, AMERICA IS A WILDERNESS, and GOING TO AMERICA IS ENACTING A BUSINESS DEAL.**”

—Szilvia Csábi

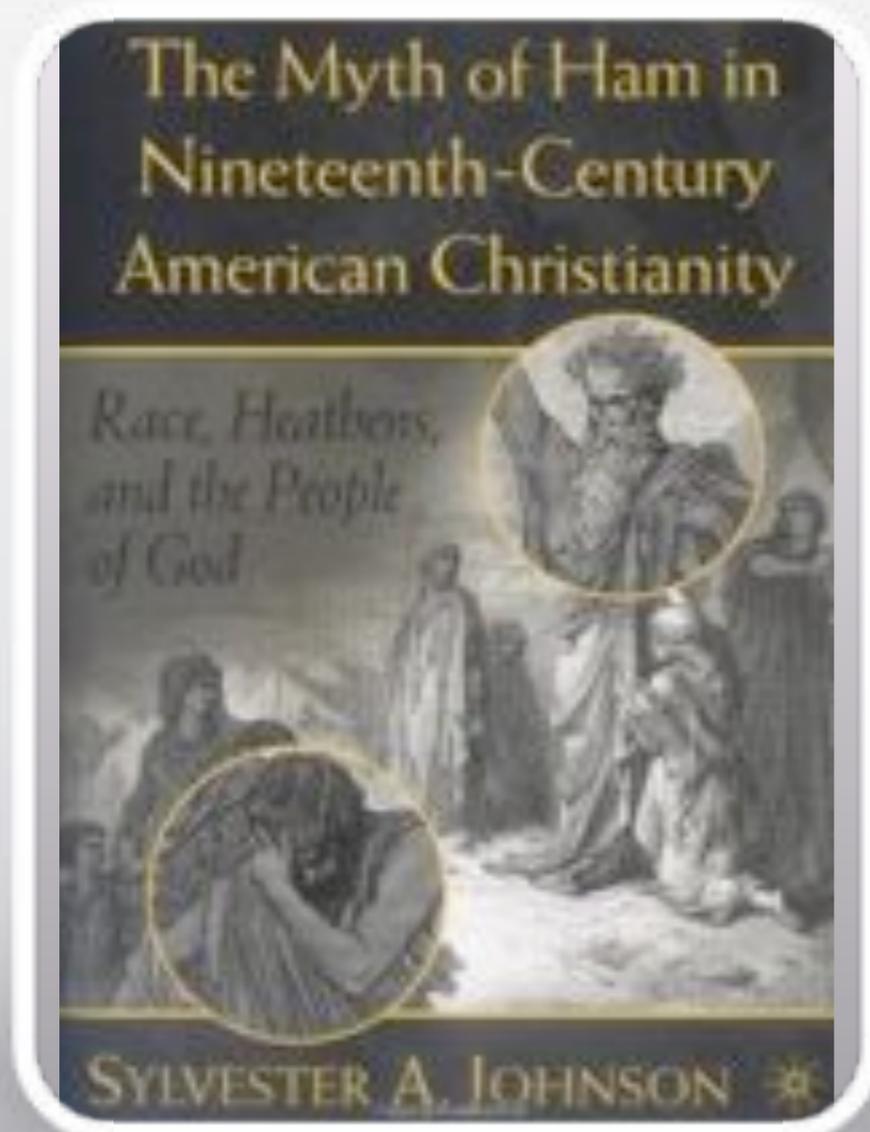
The “Manifest Destiny” Myth

- First coined in 1845 by John L. O’Sullivan (1813–1895), founder and editor of the United States Magazine and Democratic Review, in this editorial:
- Why, ... now elevating this question of the reception of Texas into the Union, out of the lower region of our past party dissensions ... for the avowed object of ... limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.
- One historian comments: “Here was the powerful phrase that promoted continental expansion, resulting in a doubling of American territory in four years.”
- Buck: The “City upon a hill” became an “empire of right” —conquering, Christianizing, and civilizing by might, in the name of these self-arrogated “rights.”

“American Progress”
by John Gast (1872)



The “Curse of Ham” Myth



- Proslavery Americans tried their best to Christianize slavery. A favorite verse of Southern clergymen:
- “Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a master in heaven.” (Colossians 4:1)
- Even more influential was the “Curse of Ham” myth:
- The verse, “Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers” (Genesis 9:25), was invoked as a proof text for Christian legitimation of slavery throughout the South.
- Etymology begat etiology: “Ham” commonly came to mean “hot,” “burnt,” “swarthy,” “dark,” and “black.”
- In the popular conception of it, the received meaning of “Ham” clearly pointed to Africa as the “hot” clime that produced the “black” race.

The African American Exodus Counter-Myth

- “Exodus functioned as an archetypal myth for the slaves. The sacred history of God’s liberation of his people would be or was being reenacted in the American South. A white Union Army chaplain working among freedmen in Decatur, Alabama, commented disapprovingly on the slaves’ fascination with Exodus:
- ‘There is no part of the Bible with which they are so familiar as the story of the deliverance of Israel. Moses is their ideal of all that is high, and noble, and perfect, in man. I think they have been accustomed to regard Christ not so much in the light of a spiritual Deliverer, as that of a second Moses who would eventually lead them out of their prison-house of bondage.’
- A prime example of this motif is the dialect poem, “An Ante-Bellum Sermon” (1895), by African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906).

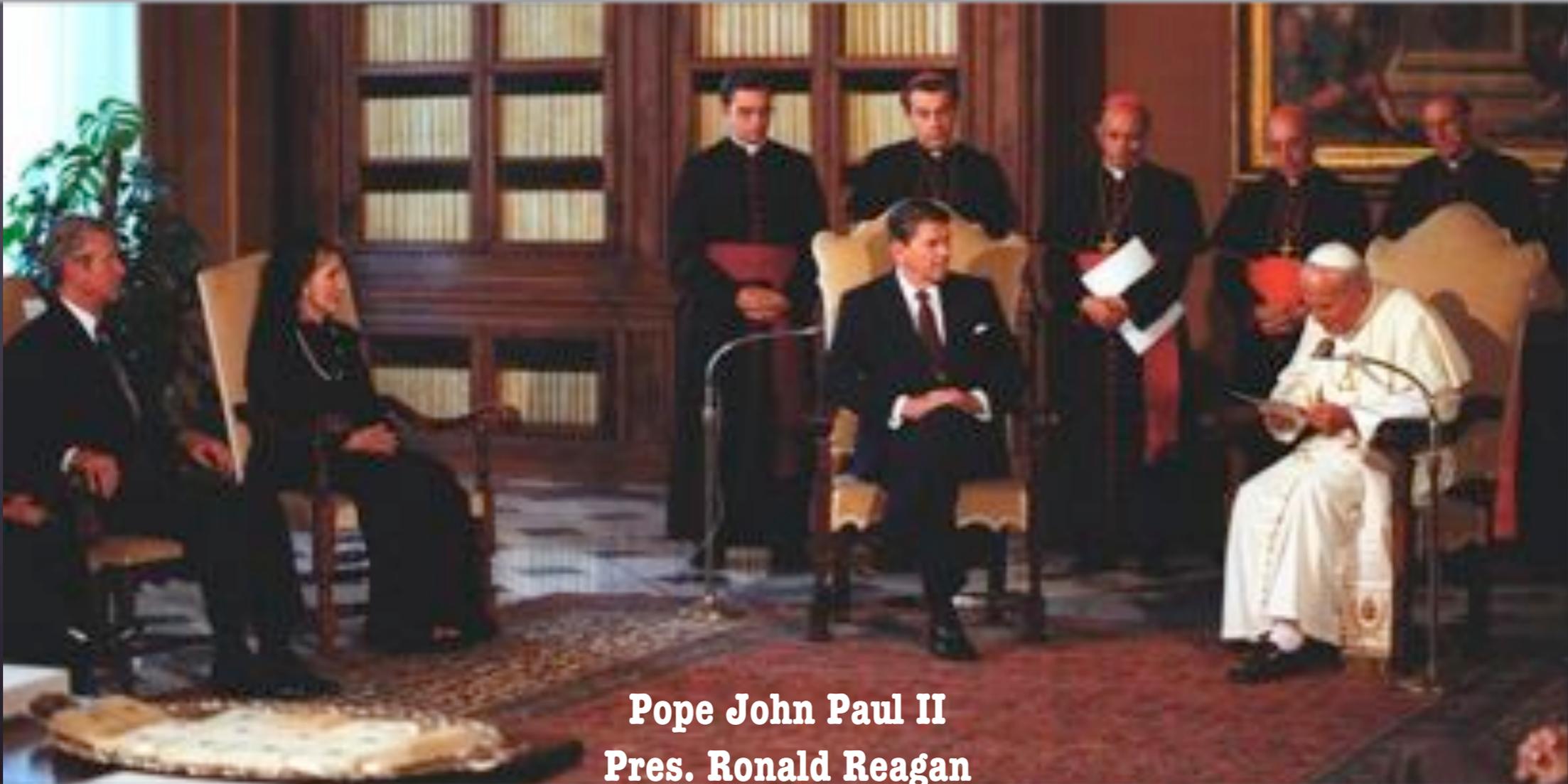


Paul Laurence Dunbar

(1872–1906)

Chapter 4

Catholic Myths & Visions of America



**Pope John Paul II
Pres. Ronald Reagan
Miami
September 10, 1987**

Papal Praise of America



Pope John Paul II
President Ronald Reagan
Miami, September 10, 1987

- Perhaps the fullest expression of papal praise of America was occasioned on the visit of Pope John Paul II to Vizcaya Museum, Miami, on Thursday, September 10, 1987, where he addressed President Ronald Reagan:
- “Mr. President . . . I wish to extol the blessing and gifts that America has received from God and cultivated, and which have become the true values of the whole American experiment in the past two centuries.”
- “The more powerful a nation is, the greater becomes its international responsibility, the greater also must be its commitment to the betterment of the lot of those whose very humanity is constantly being threatened by want and need.”

Can the Americanist Myth Become a Reality?

- Given the diverse nature of “fissiparous Protestantism,” there is no official Protestant vision of America.
- This is due, in large measure, to the lack of a central authority in Protestantism generally. Similarly, there is no official Catholic vision of America.
- But this is not for lack of a central authority, but because of the presence of it.
- The intervention of the papacy—the central authority of the Roman Catholic church put an end to a movement known as the “Americanist controversy.”
- The so-called Americanists argued that America has a divine destiny.



James Cardinal Gibbons



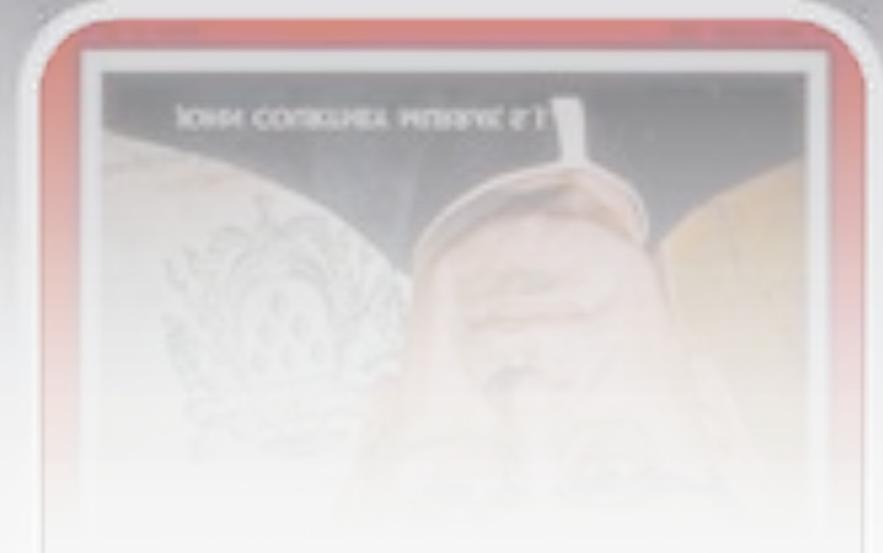
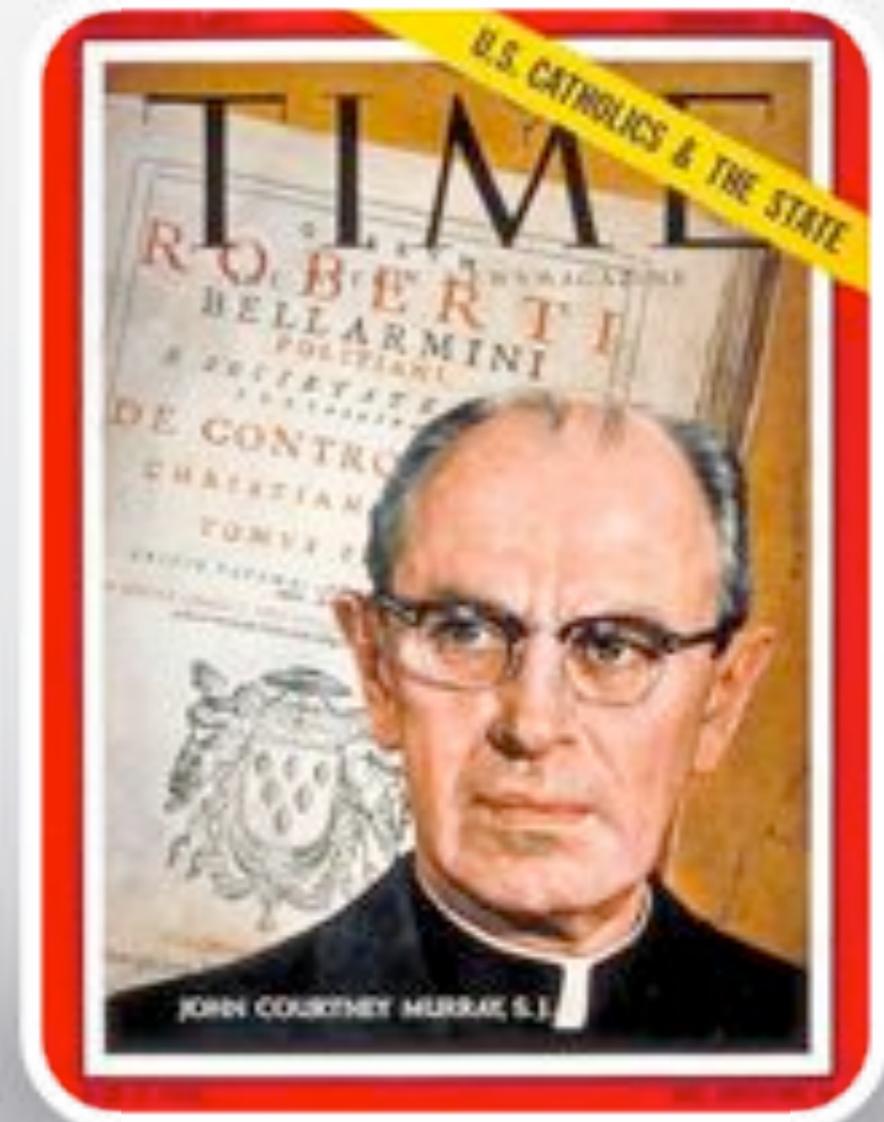
Papal Responses to the Americanist Myth



- On January 22, 1899, Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903) promulgated an encyclical, known as Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae, addressed to “Our Beloved Son, James Cardinal Gibbons, Cardinal Priest of the Title Sancta Maria ... Archbishop of Baltimore”:
- “From the foregoing it is manifest ... that we are not able to give approval to those views which, in their collective sense, are called by some ‘Americanism’.”
- By this warning, the advance of the Americanist movement was effectively halted.
- Thus, Catholic Americanism has often been called a “phantom heresy.” None of the Americanists was branded a “heretic.” The immediate threat of Americanism was contained.

Can the Americanist Myth Become a Reality?

- Another noteworthy Catholic commentary on America is John Courtney Murray's 1960 collection of essays, We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition, and reprinted by Georgetown University Press in 2005.
- In Bright Promise, Failed Community (2000), Catholic sociologist Joseph Varacalli explains why Catholic America essentially failed to shape the American Republic in any significant way.”
- Varacalli: “If this county of ours, which we love so much and which has done so much good for so many, is to escape further descent into the culture of death, it will be because of the presence, witness, and actions of a revitalized Catholic Church in the United States of America.”
- For some 20 years, Cardinal Bernardin was the most influential U.S. Catholic bishop. In A Moral Vision of America, Bernardin develops his central theme, a “consistent ethic of life.”



Pope John Paul II to President Ronald Reagan (Miami, 1987).



**Pope John Paul II
Pres. Ronald Reagan
Miami
September 10, 1987**

- “Mr. President, ... Also today, I wish to extol the blessing and gifts that America has received from God and cultivated, and which have become the true values of the whole American experiment in the past two centuries.”
- “Among the many admirable values of this nation there is one that stands out in particular. It is freedom. This is the freedom that America is called to live and guard and to transmit. She is called to exercise it in such a way that it will also benefit the cause of freedom in other nations and among other peoples.”
- “America needs freedom to be herself and to fulfill her mission in the world.”
- The reader should note that these papal remarks are not binding pronouncements. They are not issued *ex cathedra* (“from the chair” [of St. Peter]); that is, these statements are not binding upon Catholics.

Jewish Myths & Visions of America

A Prayer for our Rulers.

דְּבָרָהּ He who granteth salvation unto kings, and dominion unto princes; whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; who delivered his serrant David from the destructive sword; who maketh a way in the sea, and a path through the mighty waters. May he bless, preserve, guard, assist, exalt, and highly aggrandize,

[During the Sitting of Congress.]

The President and Vice-president, of the Union: the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled; the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, the people of this state, represented in senate and assembly, and the Magistrates of this city:

[During the Recess.]

The President and Vice-president of the United States of America: the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, and people of this state, represented in Senate and Assembly, and the Magistrates of this city.

May the Supreme King of kings, through his infinite mercy, preserve them, and grant them life, and deliver them from all manner of trouble and danger. May the Supreme King of kings exalt and highly aggrandize them, and grant them long and prosperously to rule. May the Supreme King of kings, through his in-

הַטֹּתָן בְּיָם דְּרַךְ • וּבְטִים עֲוִים שְׂתוּבָה : הוּא יִסְרָךְ • וְיִשְׁמֹר •
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During the Sitting of Congress.

The President and Vice-president of the Union, the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled: the Governor and Lieutenant Governor and people of this state, represented in Senate and Assembly, and the Magistrates of this city.

During the Recess.

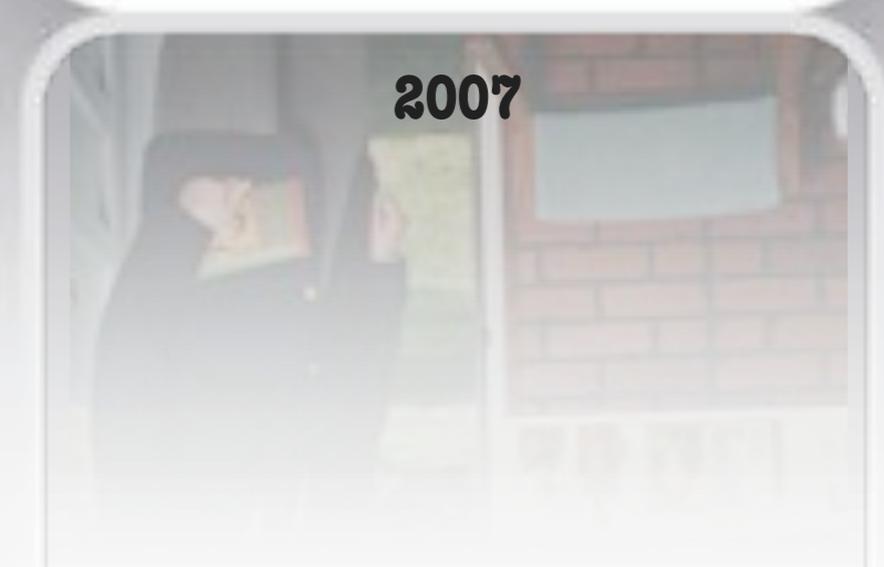
The President and Vice-president of the United States of America. The Governor and Lieutenant Governor and people of this State, represented in Senate and Assembly. The Magistrates of this city.

סֶלָה
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In 1761–1766, Isaac Pinto of New York printed the Seder ha-Tefilot, the first English translation for synagogue use, which contains the remarkable “A Prayer for Our Rulers.”

Jewish Myth of America as “The Promised Land”

- Previous slide: In 1761–1766, Isaac Pinto of New York printed the Seder ha-Tefilot, the first English translation for synagogue use, which contains the remarkable “A Prayer for Our Rulers.”
- In December 1898, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations adopted a resolution that proclaimed:
- “America is our Zion. Here in the home of religious liberty, we have aided in founding of this new Zion, the fruition of the beginning laid in the old.”
- In 1987, Conservative Rabbi Jacob Neusner wrote:
- “It is time to say that America is a better place to be a Jew than Jerusalem. If ever there was a Promised Land, we Jewish Americans are living in it. Here Jews have flourished, not alone in politics and the economy, but in matters of art, culture and learning. Jews feel safe and secure here in ways that they do not and cannot in the State of Israel.”



The Jewish “Myth of Columbus”



Christopher Columbus

Jewish?

- The Jewish myth of Columbus was developed as part of an overarching survival strategy and as a means of gaining American respect. The popular Jewish myth that Columbus himself was crypto-Jew served as a bulwark against rising nativism in America.
- “Other ethnic groups in America claimed founder status based on their putative roles as discoverers of the new world,” observes Jonathan Sarna. “Jews, I believe, are the only group which has claimed status based on ties to the Indians, the Puritans, and Columbus, as well.”
- By associating themselves with the founding myths of America, Jewish Americans could prove that they, like the Indians, were original Americans and played a role in America’s origins.

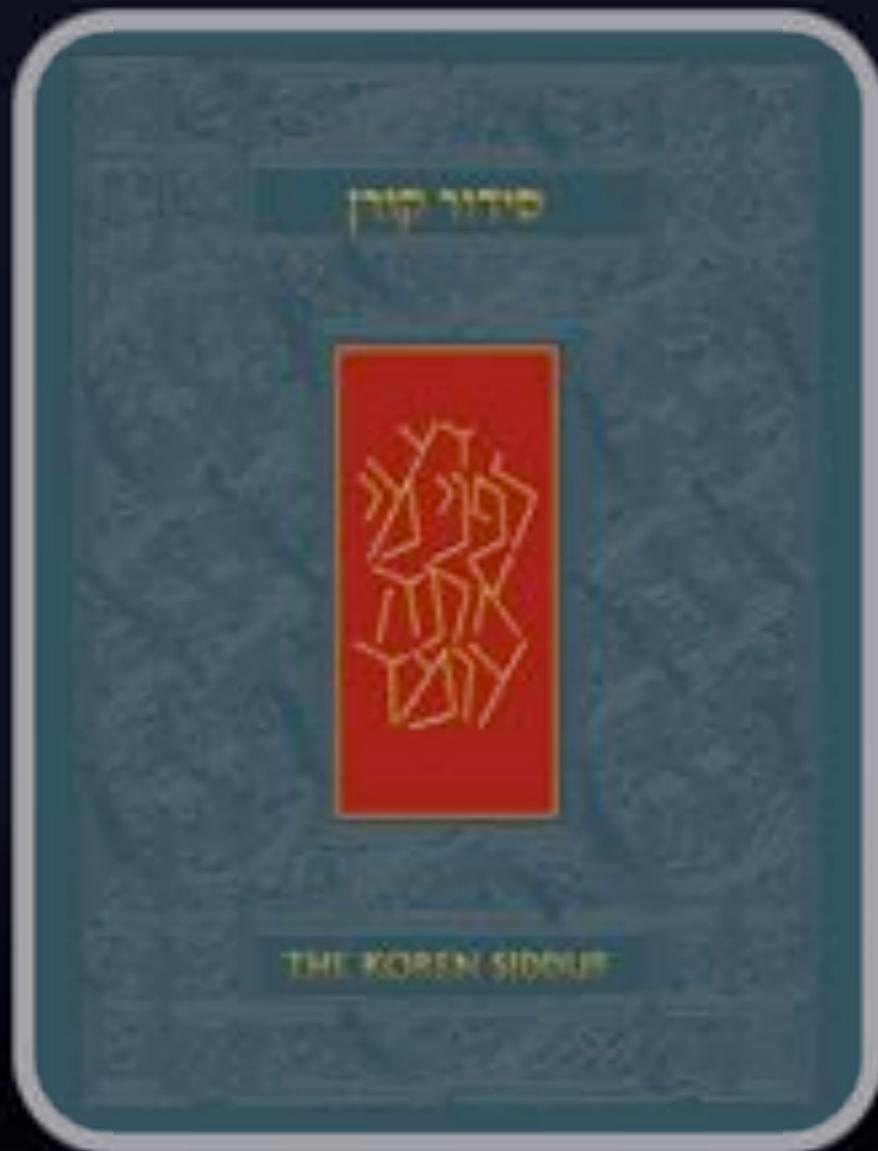
Jewish Prayers for America: Communal Visions

- While there is no communally held doctrine of America among Jews in the United States today, Jews have ritually included prayers for the U.S. government in various prayer books.
- “Second only to the Torah, the siddur (prayer book),” states one Reform rabbi, “expresses the ideology of our people.” As a congregation prays, so it believes.
- A study of these prayers, therefore, will reveal some ways in which Jews incorporate the secular into the sacred, partly through a process of sacralizing the secular.
- American Jewish prayer books are a testament to the Americanization of Judaism.



**Mishkan T'Filah
Reform Siddur**

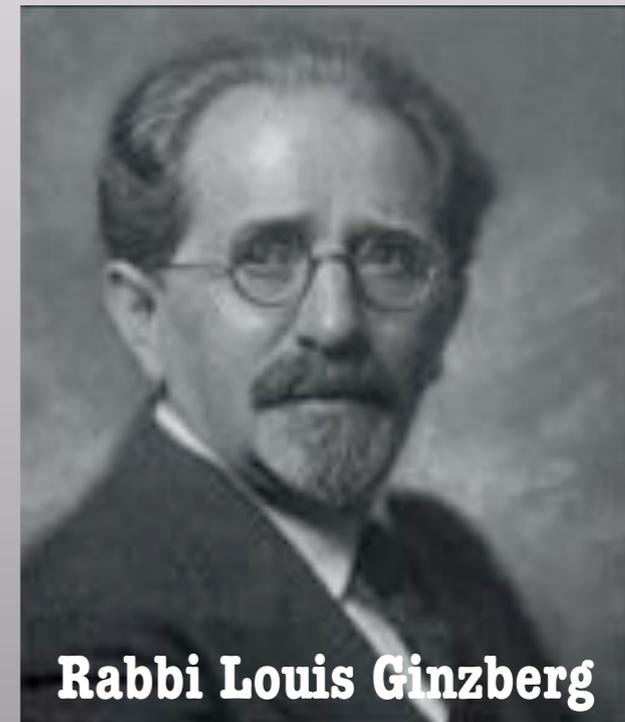
Orthodox Judaism's Traditional Prayer for Government



- The most explicitly nationalist of these Orthodox prayers for the American government is one that was rediscovered by Jonathan Sarna. The prayer, Ribbon Kol Ha-olamim, rendered into English, reads, in part:
- Master of the Universe, Lord of all Works, Who extends peace like a river, and the glory of nations like a rapid stream. Look down from Your holy dwelling and bless this land, the United States of America, whereon we dwell. Let not violence be heard in their land, ... but You shall call its walls “Salvation” and its gates “Praise.” ...
- Pour down the bounty of Your goodness upon the President, and the Vice-President of the United States. Let their prosperity be like a river, their righteousness like the waves of the sea.
- The traditional Orthodox Jewish prayer for the government is known as the Hanoten Teshu‘ah.

Conservative Judaism's Vision of America

- The new Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals continues the regular use of Louis Ginzberg's prayer for America:
- **A PRAYER FOR OUR COUNTRY**
- Our God and God of our ancestors: We ask Your blessings for our country—for its government, for its leaders and advisors, and for all who exercise just and rightful authority. Teach them insights from Your Torah, that they may administer all affairs of state fairly, that peace and security, happiness and prosperity, justice and freedom may forever abide in our midst. Creator of all flesh, bless all the inhabitants of our country with Your spirit.
- May citizens of all races and creeds forge a common bond in true harmony, to banish hatred and bigotry, and to safeguard the ideals and free institutions that are the pride and glory of our country.
- May this land, under your providence, be an influence for good throughout the world, uniting all people in peace and freedom—helping them to fulfill the vision of your prophet: “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they experience war any more” (Isaiah 2:4). And let us say: Amen.



Rabbi Louis Ginzberg

(1873–1953)

Reform Judaism's Vision of America



Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise

- The current Reform prayer for America is as follows:
FOR OUR COUNTRY
- **O GUARDIAN** of life and liberty, may our nation always merit Your protection. Teach us to give thanks for what we have by sharing it with those who are in need. Keep our eyes open to the wonders of creation, and alert to the care of the earth. May we never be lazy in the work of peace; and honor those who have died in defense of our ideals.
- Grant our leaders wisdom and forbearance. May they govern with justice and compassion. ... May our homes be safe from affliction and strife, and may our country be sound in body and spirit. Amen

Reconstructionist Judaism's Vision of America

- In old prayer book, “God’s Goodness—the Testament of America”:
- Thy goodness is revealed in the Testament of America, ... a nation founded on the truth, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among those rights are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. ...
- May we ever be worthy of our American heritage; may we ever treasure our liberties, not for ourselves alone but for all our fellowmen; and may our country become a guiding light to all mankind.
- In the words of Abraham Lincoln: With malice toward none, with charity for all ...
- For all these, O Lord Our God, we thank Thee: for Thy goodness as maintained in Nature, in the human spirit, in Israel’s Torah, and in America’s promise.
- The new Kol Haneshamah prayer book series includes Louis Ginzberg’s prayer for America, followed by “A prayer for the State of Israel.



Jewish Americanism: The “Cult of Synthesis”



Jonathan D. Sarna

- Historian of American Judaism, Jonathan Sarna, writes:
 - This understanding of the American Jewish experience—the belief that Judaism and Americanism reinforce one another, the two traditions converging in a common path—encapsulates a central theme in American Jewish culture that may be termed “the cult of synthesis.”
 - Dating back well over a century, it reflects an ongoing effort on the part of American Jews to interweave their “Judaism” with their “Americanism” in an attempt to fashion for themselves some unified, “synthetic” whole.
 - Anyone even remotely connected with American Jewish life is familiar with this theme, which has elsewhere been described as a central tenet of American Jewish “civil

Chapter 6

Mormon Myths & Visions of America

Cardston Alberta Temple



The Garden of Eden Myth

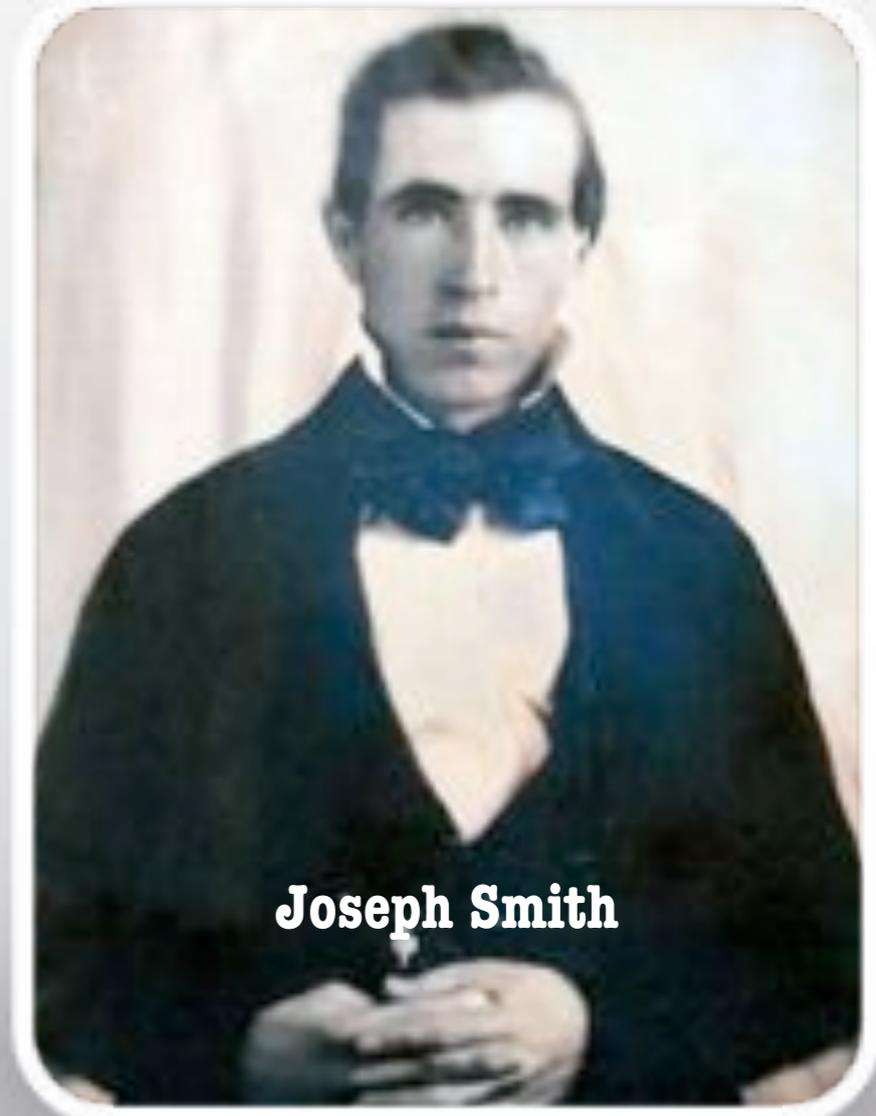
Garden of Eden – Independence, Missouri



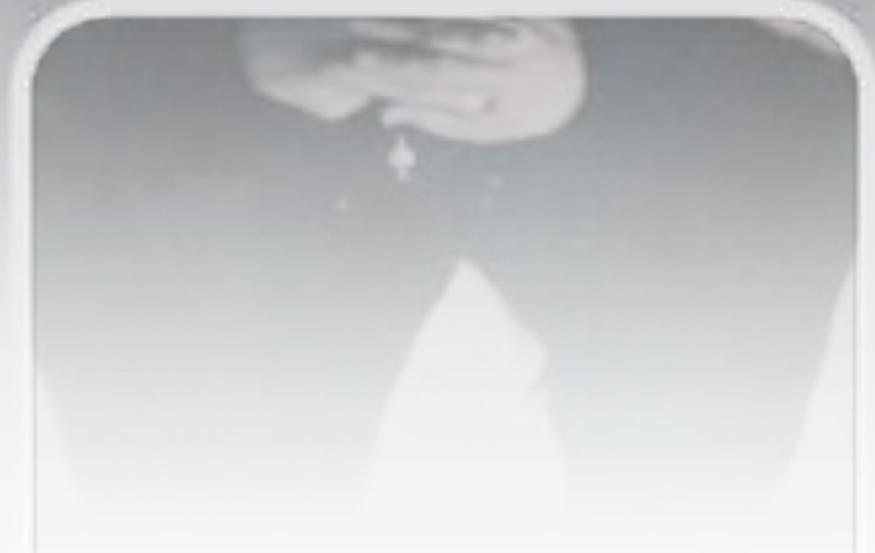
- America, in Mormon belief, has had a special place in salvation history since primordial times. America was once Paradise.
- Brigham Young, who succeeded Mormon prophet-founder Joseph Smith after the latter was assassinated in 1844, disclosed that the Garden of Eden was located in the heart of ancient America:
- “In the beginning, after this earth was prepared for man, the Lord commenced his work upon what is now called the American continent, where the Garden of Eden was made.”
- A direct link between the Latter Days and creation resides in the Mormon belief that the Garden of Eden was located in what is now Independence, in Jackson County, Missouri.

The Lost Tribes Myth

- The inhabitants of the New World were believed to have all been the direct descendants of the patriarch Joseph.
- According to the Book of Mormon, soon after his resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared in America to both the Nephites (descendants of Nephi, a great prophet who lived around 600 BCE) and the Lamanites. Jesus said: “And behold, this people will I establish in this land, unto the fulfilling of the covenant which I made with your father Jacob; and it shall be a New Jerusalem.” (3 Nephi 20:22)
- A Mormon film, Christ in America, treats the legend of Quetzalcoatl as an ancient memory of Christ’s visitation to the New World as sober fact.
- By asserting Israelite origins for Native Americans, with Jesus Christ having appeared to them, the Book of Mormon has succeeded in establishing America as another Holy Land.



Joseph Smith



The Columbus Myth

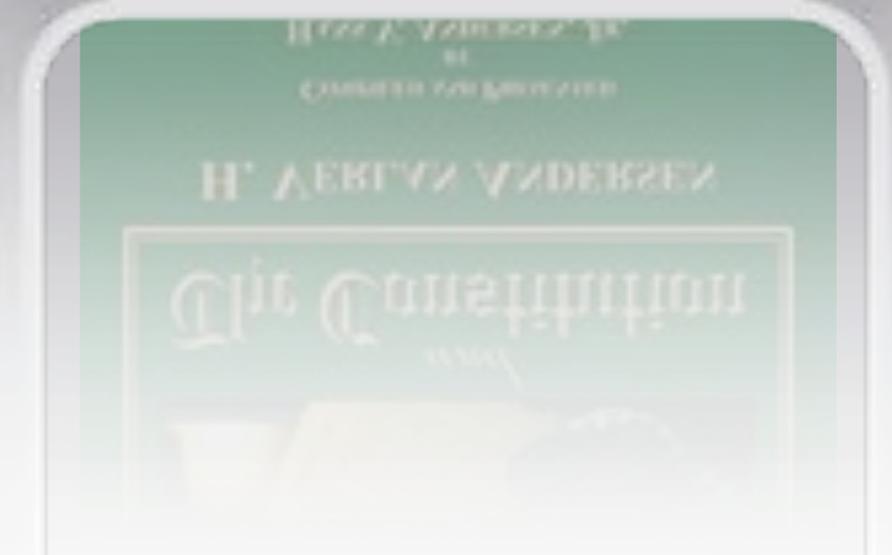
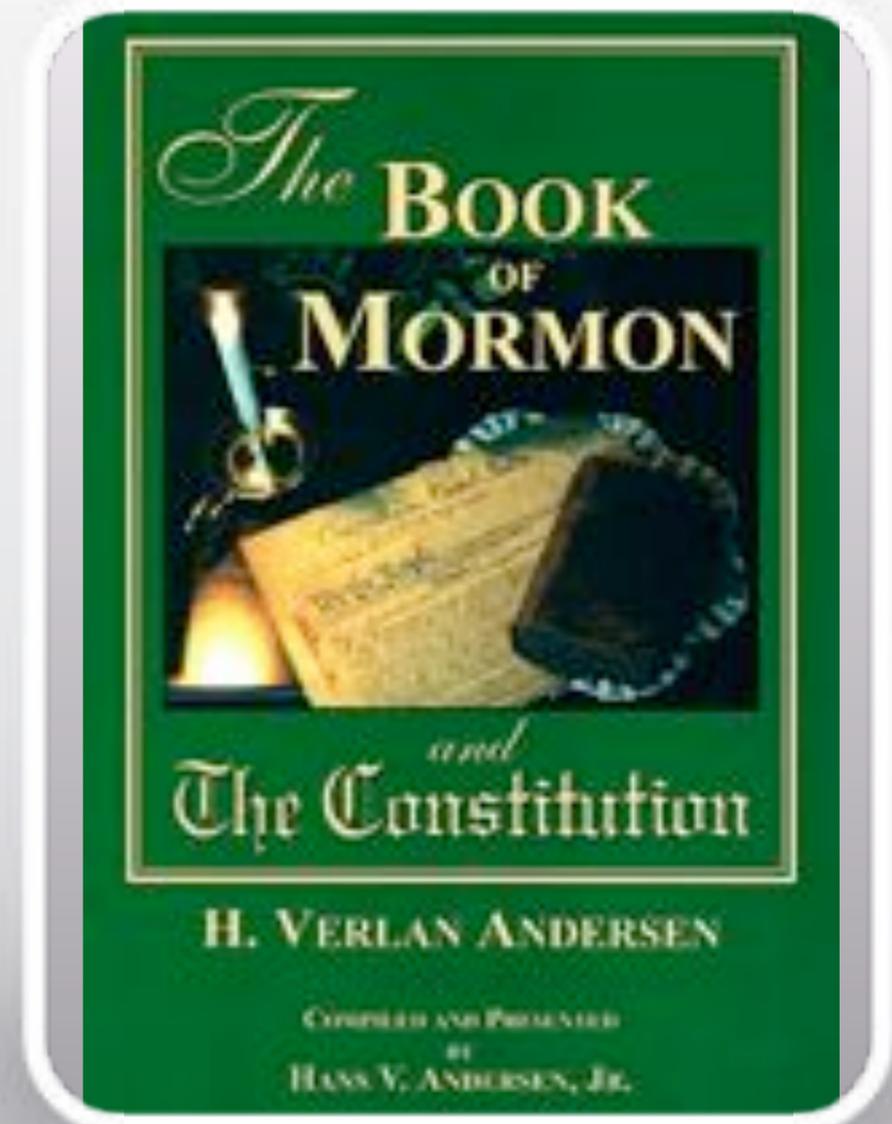


John Vanderlyn, “The Landing of Columbus” (1847), commissioned by Congress.

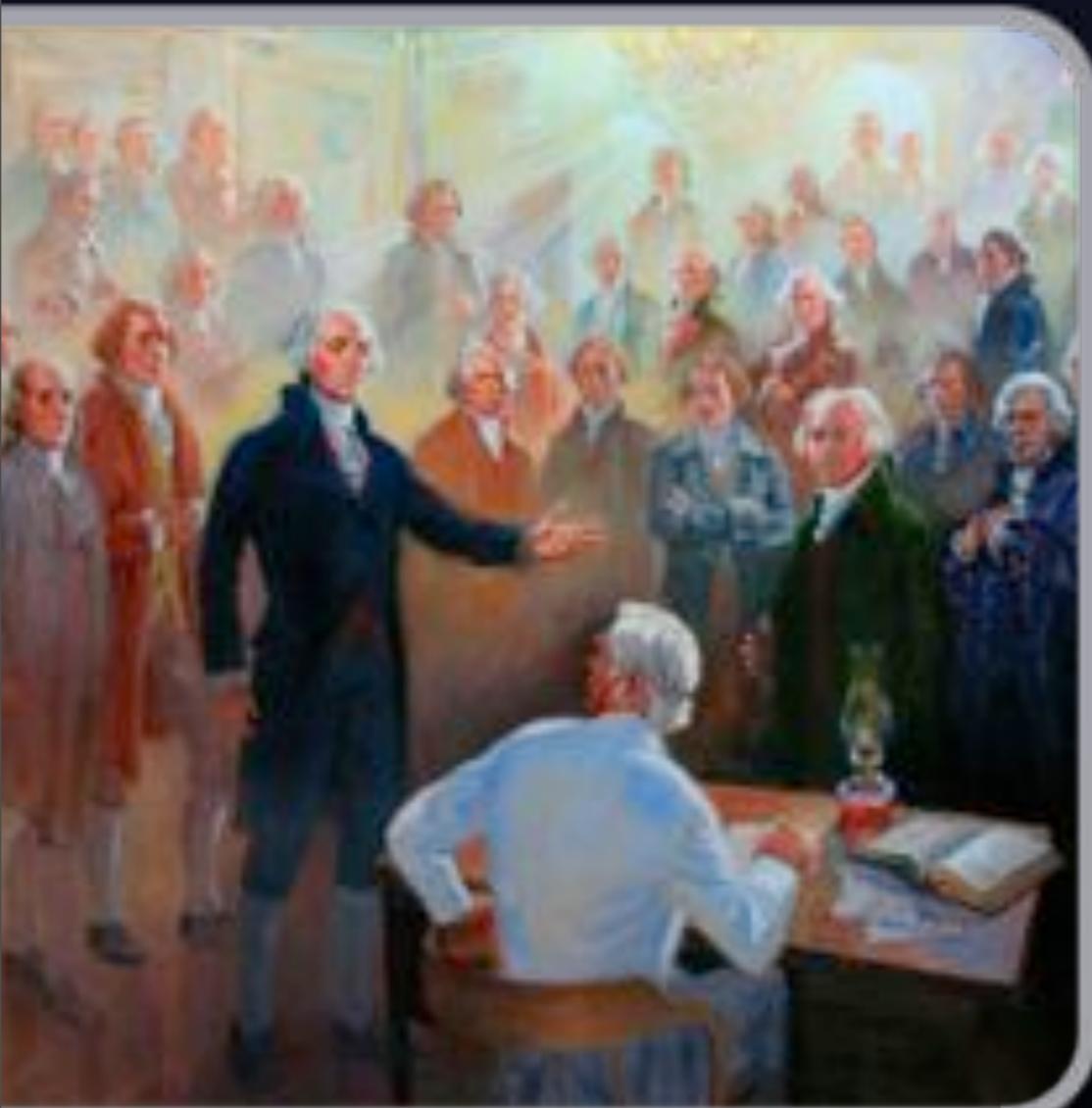
- Apart from a single verse, Christopher Columbus has no religious significance for Mormons. The Book of Mormon, Latter-day Saints generally believe, foretells the 1492 voyage of Christopher Columbus:
- “And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land.” (1 Nephi 13:12)
- The “promised land” alludes to America. Columbus’s discovery of America, accordingly, fulfills Nephi’s prophecy.

The Constitution Myth

- Latter-day Saints see the hand of Providence at work in the founding of America, with the conviction that the Constitution of the United States of America was divinely inspired. This derives, in part, from the following revelation given to the prophet Joseph Smith, in which Jesus Christ states:
- “And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood.” (D&C 101:80)
- That is not to say that God revealed the Constitution, but that there is a dimension of sacred purpose infused within it. One might characterize this influx of spiritual genius within the Constitution as the presence of an invisible, divine signature above the flourish of John Hancock.



The Founding Fathers Myth

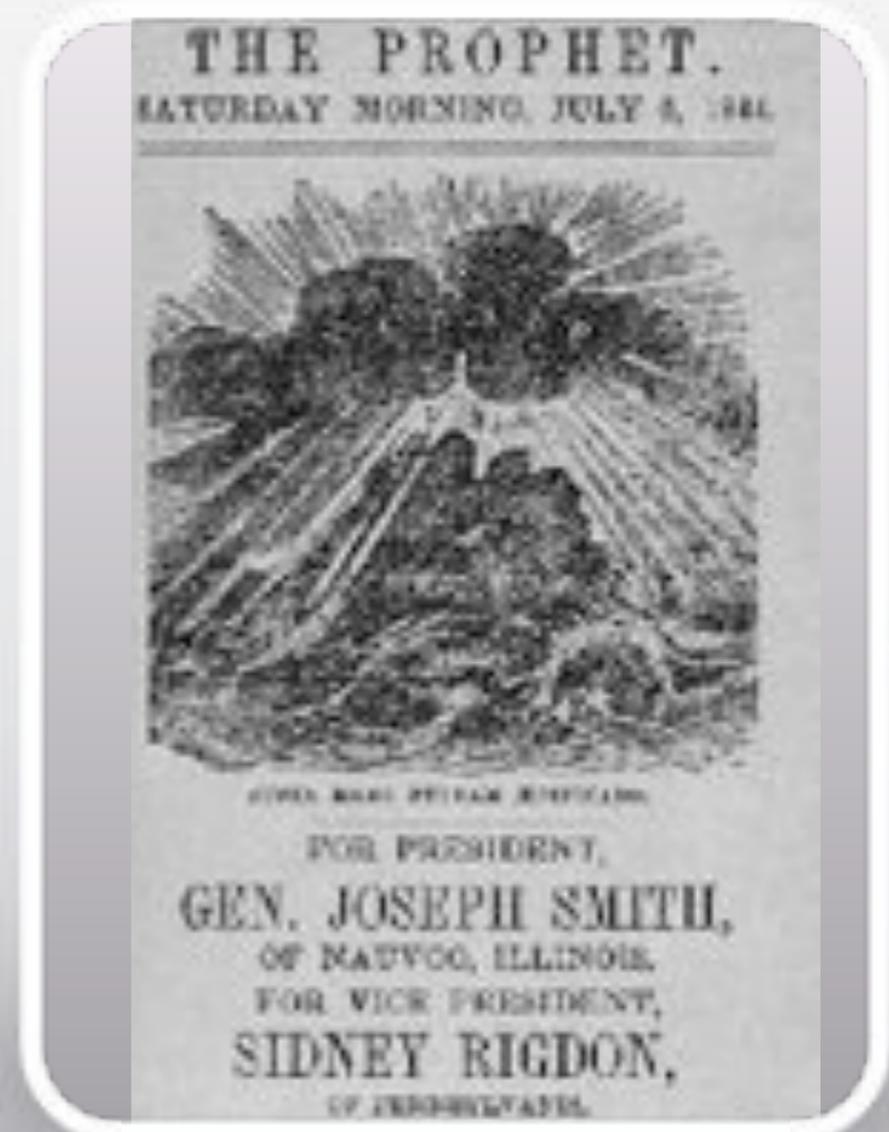


**“That We May Be Redeemed”
by Harold I. Hopkinson
St. George Temple**

- Wilford Woodruff (1807–1898) fourth LDS president, claimed that, in 1877, George Washington, John Wesley, Benjamin Franklin, and Christopher Columbus appeared to Woodruff in the Saint George Temple (in Saint George, Utah) requesting baptism in recompense for their role in helping prepare for the restoration of the gospel:
- Those men who laid the foundation of this American government . . . were the best spirits the God of heaven could find on the face of the earth. These were choice spirits, not wicked men. General Washington and all of the men that labored for the purpose were inspired of the Lord
- Every one of those men that signed the Declaration of Independence with General Washington called upon me as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ in the temple at St. George two consecutive nights and demanded at my hands that I should go forth and attend to the ordinances of the House of God for them .

The Theodemocracy Myth

- It was during his campaign for president of the United States that prophet Joseph Smith first coined the term “theodemocracy” on April 15, 1844:
- I go emphatically, virtuously, and humanely, for a **THEODEMOCRACY**, where God and the people hold the power to conduct the affairs of men in righteousness. And where liberty, free trade, and sailor’s rights, and the protection of life and property shall be maintained inviolate, for the benefit of ALL. To exalt mankind is nobly acting the part of a God; to degrade them, is meanly doing the drudgery of the devil. Unitas, libertas, caritas esto perpetua.



The America as Zion Myth



Brigham Young
(c. 1870)

- In the LDS creed known as the Articles of Faith, Article 10 explicitly claims that Zion will be built on North American soil:
- “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion will be built upon this [the American] continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.”
- Latter-day Saints actually believe in two end-time “Zions” —one in Israel (Jerusalem) and the other in America (Independence, Missouri). This is based on a literal interpretation of such verses as Isaiah 24:23, interpreted with eschatological symmetry.

The Mark of Cain Myth

- In 1 Nephi 12:23, the Lamanites (a term that refers to Native Americans), because of their unbelief, “became a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations.”
- Why did the curse take the form of color? The reason is given in 2 Nephi 5:21, 23 which relates:
- “And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, . . . wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.”
- “And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed with the same cursing.”
- 2 Nephi 30:6 promises, when these lost Jews, the Lamanites, believe in Christ, they shall become a pure and delightsome people.” In the original text of the Book of Mormon, the word “pure” had read “white.”



“Christ preaches the Gospel to the inhabitants of Ancient Americans”

Priesthood Restored to Black Males (1978)

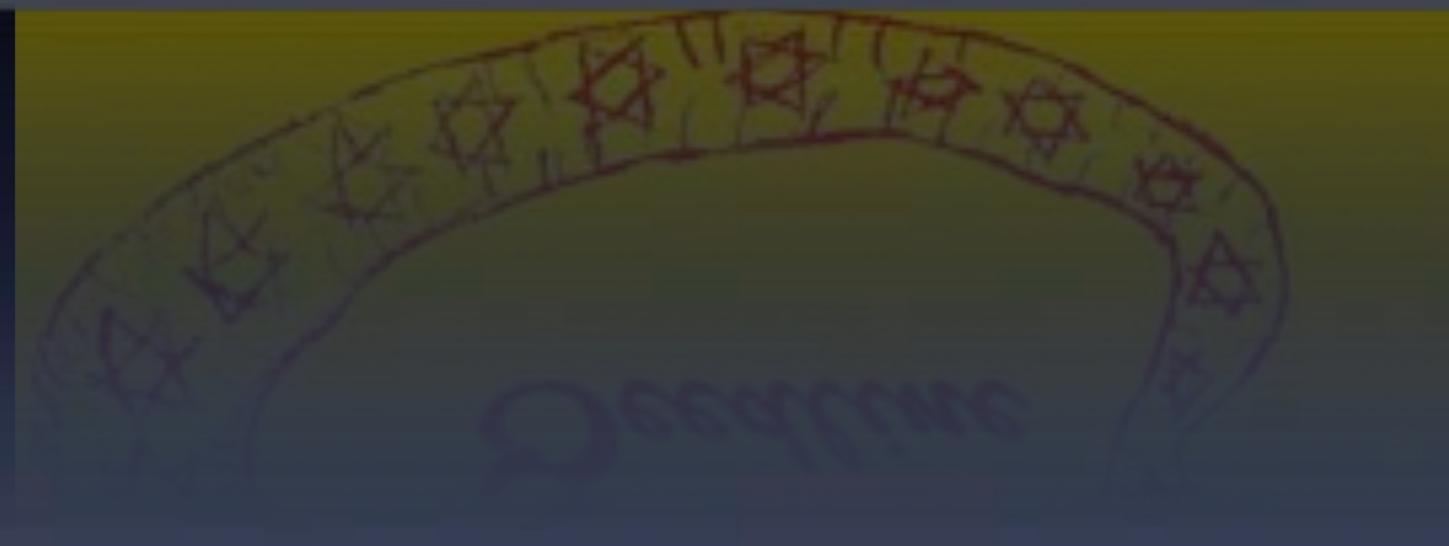


President Spencer Kimball

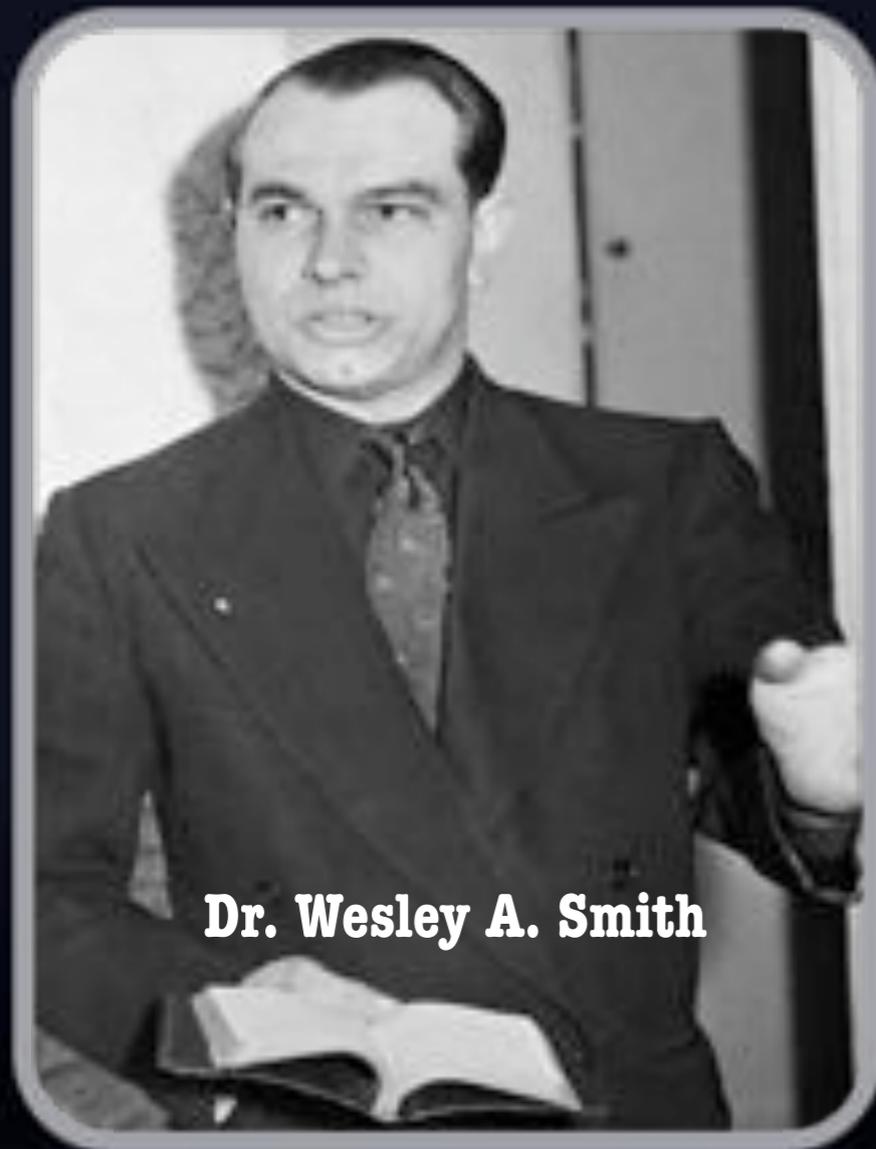
1895 – 1985

- Furthermore, in the Book of Moses, black skin was associated with the progeny of Cain: “The seed of Cain were black.”
- Cain’s descendants were heirs to the curse, such that “a blackness came upon all the children of Canaan, that they were despised among all people.”
- Said to be under the “curse of Canaan,” black males were thus barred from the Mormon priesthood.
- On June 8, 1978, as the result of a personal revelation —witnessed by high-ranking Church authorities— President Spencer W. Kimball announced that “all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color.”

Christian Identity Myths & Visions of America



The Two-Seed Myth

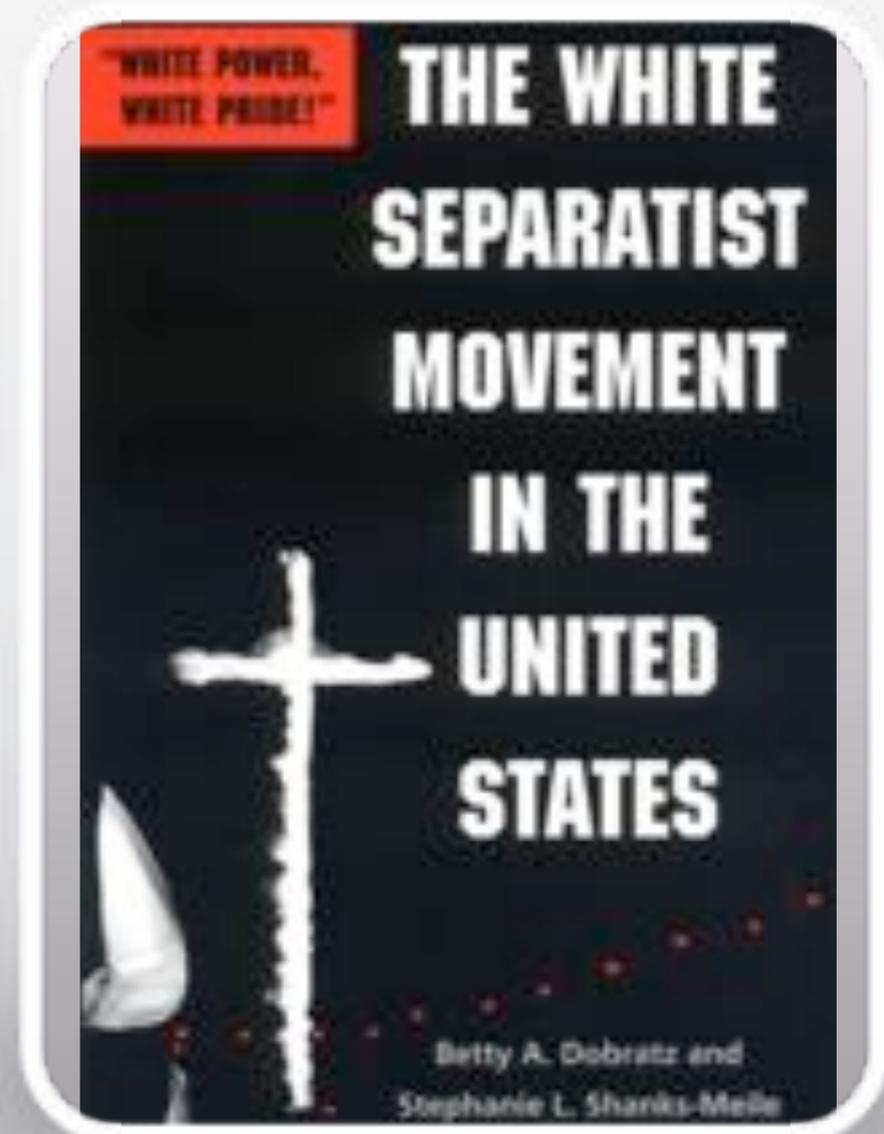


Dr. Wesley A. Smith

- “Kingdom Identity Ministries Doctrinal Statement of Beliefs”:
- **WE BELIEVE** in an existing being known as the Devil or Satan and called the Serpent (Gen. 3:1; Rev. 12:9), who has a literal “seed” or posterity in the earth (Gen. 3:15) commonly called Jews today (Rev. 2:9; 3:9; Isa. 65:15). These children of Satan (John 8:44-47; Matt. 13:38; John 8:23) through Cain (I John 2:22, 4:3) who have throughout history always been a curse to true Israel, the Children of God, because of a natural enmity between the two races (Gen. 3:15), because they do the works of their father the Devil (John 8:38-44), and because they please not God, and are contrary to all men (I Thes. 2:14-15), though they often pose as ministers of righteousness (II Cor. 11:13-15). The ultimate end of this evil race whose hands bear the blood of our Savior (Matt. 27:25) and all the righteous slain upon the earth (Matt. 23:35), is Divine judgment (Matt. 13:38-42, 15:13; Zech. 14:21).

The Mud Races Myth

- It is a commonplace, on the Internet, to see consistent references to Christian Identity groups calling non-White (and non-Jewish) races as “mud peoples” or “mud races.”
- The term “mud peoples” evidently was coined by avowed atheist Ben Klassen, founder of the World Church of the Creator and author of two WCOTC scriptures, Nature’s Eternal Religion and The White Man’s Bible.
- The term then migrated to Identity enclaves, becoming part and parcel of the popular parlance of White supremacists generally.



The Lost Tribes Myth



Dr. Wesley Smith & Wife

- Wesley Swift adapted British Israelism (a.k.a. Anglo-Israelism, i.e. Whites are the true Jews because they are descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel) to America spread to other Christian Identity sects.
- Kingdom Identity “Doctrinal Statement of Beliefs”:
- “WE BELIEVE that the United States of America fulfills the prophesied (II Sam. 7:10; Isa. 11:12; Ezek. 36:24) place where Christians from all the tribes of Israel would be regathered.” ...
- “North America is the wilderness (Hosea 2:14) to which God brought the dispersed seed of israel, the land between two seas (Zech. 9:10), surveyed and divided by rivers (Isa. 18:1–2,7), where springs of water and streams break out and the desert blossoms as the rose (Isa. 35:1,6–7).”

The Northwest Imperative Myth

- In 1977, Richard Butler established the Church of Jesus Christ Christian, and then the political wing, the Aryan Nations, in 1979.
- Openly advocated establishing a Whites-only “homeland” in the Pacific Northwest (the “Ten Percent Solution”).
- The Pacific Northwest would be a Whites-only, exclusively heterosexual enclave within the borders of five states: Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming (“Northwest Imperative”).
- Butler’s Hayden Lake compound was the crown jewel of the Aryan movement, until \$6.3 million civil judgment against him, *Keenan v. Aryan Nations*, No. CV-99-441 (Idaho 2000).



The Racial Holy War Myth



- Identity prophecies that Christ will return to bring judgment on the other non-White races:
- The WCOTC coined the phrase “RaHoWa” as a battle cry for “Racial Holy War,” and it serves as an official greeting as well.
- RaHoWa seeks the overthrow of ZOG (Zionist Occupation Government), which is part of the Christian Identity myth of a Zionist plot to destroy the White race through miscegenation.
- The Little White Book ends, on p. 33: “A RACIAL HOLY WAR under the victorious flag of the one and only, true and revolutionary White Racial Religion—CREATIVITY—is the ONLY SALVATION for the White Race.”

Chapter 8

Black Muslim Myths & Visions of America



Minister Louis Farrakhan

Los Angeles September 14, 1985

The Yacub Myth



Yacub

Creator of the White Race

- Just before Christmas in December 1962, Malcolm X delivered his vociferously anti-White sermon, “Black Man’s History,” at the Harlem’s Nation of Islam’s Mosque No. 7 in Harlem.
- Born in the year 8,400, Yacub, the evil Black scientist, discovered the law of magnetism at the age of six.
- As polar opposites attract, magnetism inspired Yacub to create a race that was the polar opposite of Blacks.
- By so doing, he would create a human magnetic force field. Yacub later discovered the secrets of genetics.
- Yacub accomplished this by a birth control law designed to favor light-skinned offspring over black-skinned infants.
- When the book of Genesis says, “Let us make man,” these were Yacub’s words, not God’s.

Whites Mated with Dogs

- From Malcolm X's "Black Man's History" (1962):
- Oh yes, this was the white man, brother, up in the caves of Europe. He had a tail that long . . . The Honorable Elijah Muhammad says . . . what the white man would do, he'd dig a hole in the hill, that was his cave. And his mother and his daughter and his wife would all be in there with the dog. The only thing that made friends with the white man was the dog. . . . It was then that the dog and the white man amalgamated. The white woman went with the dog while they were living in the caves of Europe. And right to this very day the white woman will tell you there is nothing she loves better than a dog. They tell you that a dog is a man's best friend. They lived in that cave with those dogs and right now they got that dog smell.



Malcolm X



The Mother Plane Myth



- The “Mother Wheel” myth is based on Elijah Muhammad’s allegorization of passages from Ezekiel 10:2–11. Louis Farrakhan states:
- Literally made in Japan, the “giant Mother Plane” (which Whites call UFOs)—was foretold by the prophet Ezekiel, who described it as “a wheel that looked like a cloud by day but a pillar of fire by night.”
- The creation of “some of the original [black] scientists,” the Mother Wheel was “made of the toughest steel,” is “a half mile by a half mile,” “is like a small human built planet,” is a giant hangar for “1,500 smaller ships, each equipped with three “drill bombs.”

The Destruction of American Myth

- Speech delivered by the Honorable Louis Farrakhan, June 9, 1996, at Mosque Maryam in Chicago: “The Divine Destruction of America: Can She Avert It?”:
- “And the final act of destruction,” Farrakhan warns, “will be that Allah will make a wall out of the atmosphere over and around North America.”
- God will then “cut a shortage in gravity and a fire will start from 13-layers up and burn down, burning the atmosphere.” America will then “burn for 310 years and take 690 years to cool off.”
- In 1985, Farrakhan had a vision: Farrakhan walked up a mountain to an Aztec temple together with some companions. When he got to the top of the mountain, a UFO appeared. Farrakhan asked his companions to go with him but was corrected from the spacecraft: “Just you, brother Farrakhan.”



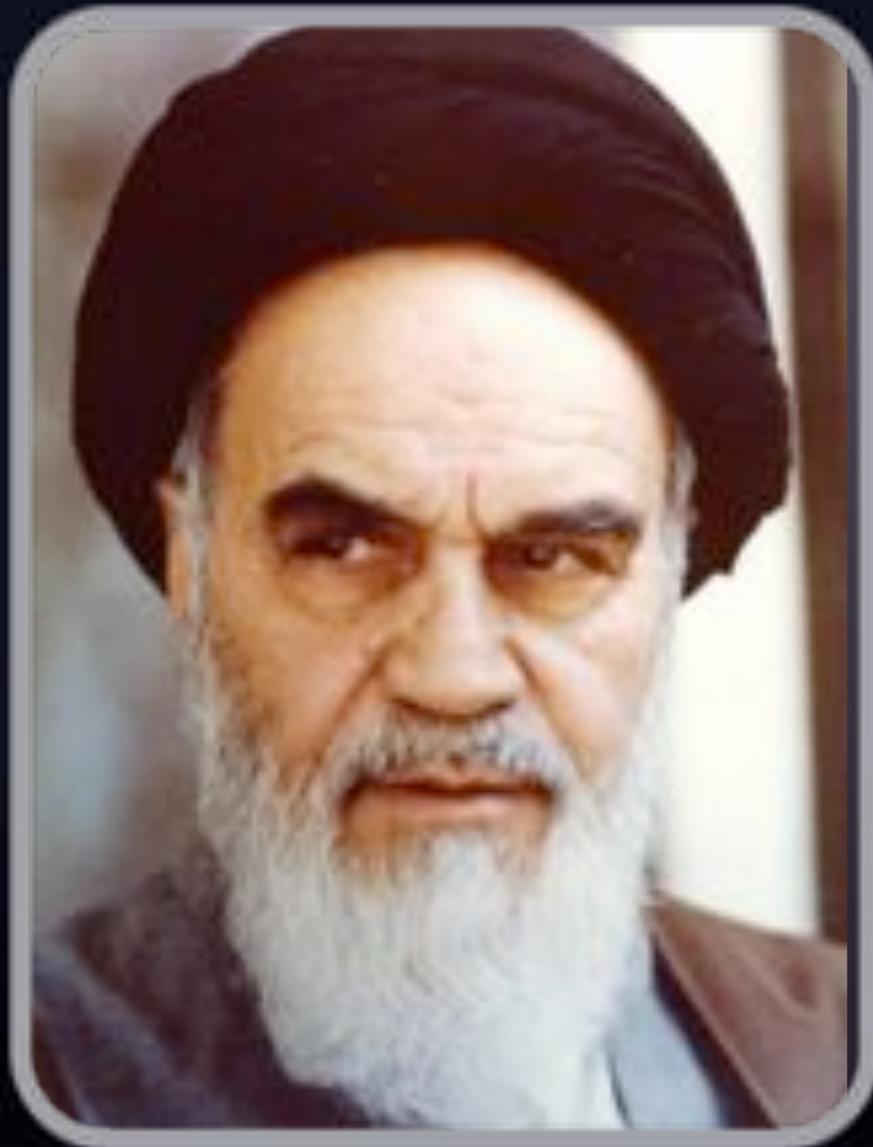
Hon. Louis Farrakhan

Chapter 9

Contemporary Muslim Myths & Visions of America



The “Great Satan” Myth



Ayatollah Khomeini

- Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini—supreme leader of Revolutionary Iran, on November 5, 1979, demonized America as “the Great Satan, the wounded snake.”
- Russia was named the “Other Satan” and Britain the “Little Satan.”
- Other countries in the West have been variously branded as Little Satans, as has Israel.
- On September 27, 2002, Hezbollah Leader Nasrallah:
- “Our hostility to the Great Satan is absolute. ...
- Regardless of how the world has changed after 11 September, ‘Death to America’ will remain our reverberating and powerful slogan.”

The “Axis of Evil” Countermyth

- On January 29, 2002, President George W. Bush delivered his “State of the Union Address”:
- “States like these [Iran, Iraq, and North Korea], and their terrorist allies, constitute an Axis of Evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.”
- David Frum, White House speech writer, came up with “axis of hatred” to describe the linkage between Iraq and terrorism. Frum’s boss, Michael Gerson, evangelical Christian, changed the phrase to “Axis of Evil.”
- Condoleezza Rice, President Bush’s National Security Advisor, and Stephen Hadley, Deputy National Security Advisor, suggested adding North Korea and Iran as part of the axis.
- Hadley had second thoughts about adding Iran, because it had a democratically elected president, but Bush liked the idea of including Iran. “No,” the president said, “I want it in.”



Pres. Bush’s Axis of Evil Speech

Dispelling the “Great Satan” & “Axis of Evil” Myths

U.S.-sponsored al-Hurra began broadcasting on February 14, 2004 but has the lowest TV ratings



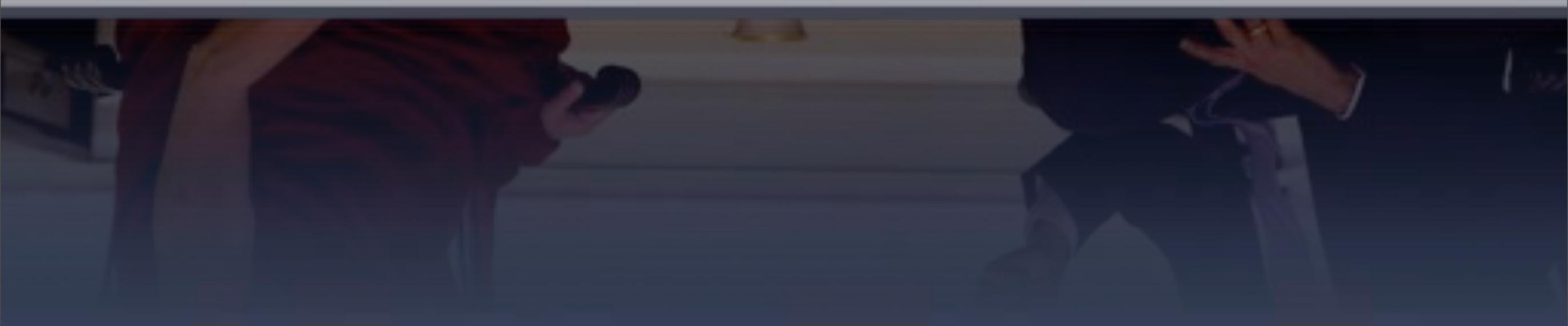
- The U.S. Department of State has experimented with reaching out to Muslims to dispel the myth of America as anti-Muslim and as the Great Satan.
- On February 14, 2002, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell appeared on MTV: “So, far from being the Great Satan, I would say that we are the Great Protector.”
- The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), an organization of U.S. international broadcasters, launched a public relations campaign operated under a five-year plan, from 2002 through 2007.
- On February 14, 2004, the BBG launched al-Hurra (Arabic for “the free one”) covering 22 countries in the Middle East via the same satellites used by major indigenous Arabic channels.

Chapter 10

Buddhist Myths & Visions of America



Feb. 18, 2010



Soka Gakkai's "America's Second Renaissance" Myth



**Daisaku Ikeda, President
Sokka Gakkai International**

- SGI Buddhists chant "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo."
- In Songs for America, Ikeda writes that Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, founder of SGI: "saw in America/the land where future civilizations/would encounter and unite."
- In My Dear Friends in America (2001), Ikeda states: "The advance of America is the advance of the world. An inch of growth for America is an inch of growth for the rest of the world. I am convinced that, in the future, America will of necessity become the central stage for the SGI movement."
- The Buddhist leader calls this social awakening a social renewal: "Our goal—the Second American Renaissance" in which American society will "advance" from conflict, divisiveness, and hatred to "union," "coexistence," and "fraternity."

Robert Thurman: America's "Second Renaissance" Myth

- In 1964, the Dalai Lama ordained Thurman as the first Western Tibetan Buddhist monk.
- In 1997, Thurman named one of Time magazine's 25 most influential persons. (Father of Uma Thurman.)
- In 1998, Thurman published his Buddhist manifesto, Inner Revolution: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Real Happiness, with a foreword by the Dalai Lama himself.
- Thurman urges Westerners to adopt five political principles that are said to derive from the spiritual precepts of Tibetan Buddhism: "transcendent individualism, nonviolent pacifism, educational evolutionism, ecosocial altruism, and universal democratism."
- Thurman also advocates a "Second Renaissance," which is the discovery and application of the advanced "inner science" of ancient Tibetan Buddhist precepts and practices.



Robert Thurman & the Dalai Lama



Dalai Lama: “Buddhist Democracy” & America’s World Role

The Dalai Lama at Congress in 2010



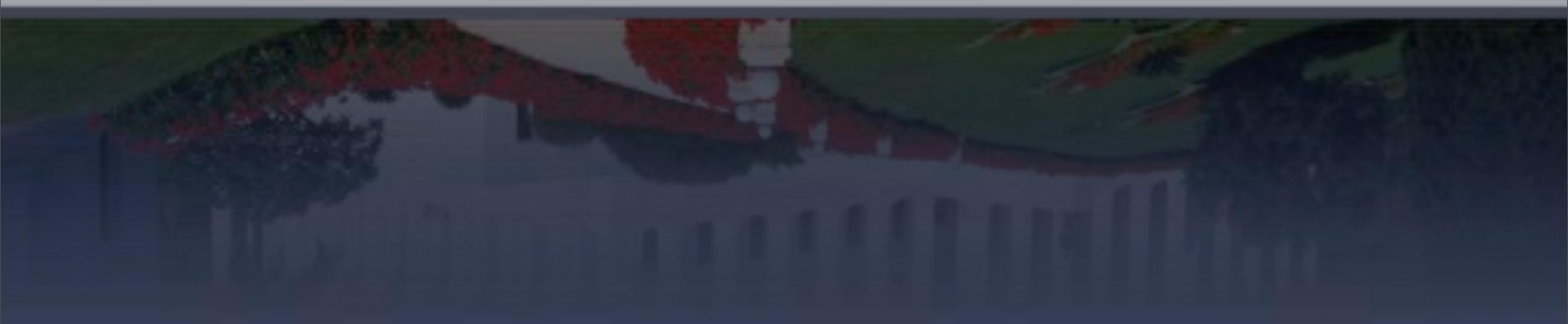
- In his speech to Congress on 18 April 1991 in Washington, DC, the Dalai Lama said of America’s world role:
- “So in this respect, our entire humanity has a responsibility, particularly this nation.” ...
- “Therefore, I think America has the potential to make this world straight.”
- “I think this nation is the only superpower. Therefore, I think you have the opportunity or ability to change it.”
- (1995) “The United States must not underestimate its role in the world today. As Americans you should be proud ... of the values upon which your Constitution is based. Accordingly, you should not shirk from your responsibility to bring those same fundamental rights and freedoms to people living under totalitarian regimes.”

Chapter 11

Bahá'í Myths & Visions of America



Seat of the Universal House of Justice





'Abdu'l-Bahá as Knight of the British Empire

April 27, 1920

Brief Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith

Race Unity Day picnic in Bedford, TN



- As the religious landscape of America continues to diversify, there is one new religion that seeks to unify: the Bahá'í Faith, which historically dates back to 1844.
- “The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's independent religions,” states the official Web site of the Bahá'í World Centre, located on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel.
- Established in 189 independent countries and 46 territories, the Bahá'í community today numbers around 5.5 million members, who hail from across the world's races, religions, and nations, including over 2,100 different ethnicities.
- Preaches a gospel of unity, and it has a global community to match and to model the potentialities of its grander vision.



Bahá'í Myths as “Sacred History” of America

- Bahá'í scholar, Dr. Robert Stockman:
- “Like any religious group, the American Bahá'ís have constructed a sacred history, or myth, about their country.”
- “The American Bahá'ís utilized the historic events and basic principles of their new religion to define a new myth of America, one that contained much of the confidence and optimism of the traditional Protestant view of America as a ‘redeemer nation’.”



Dr. Robert Stockman

Director, Wilmette Institute

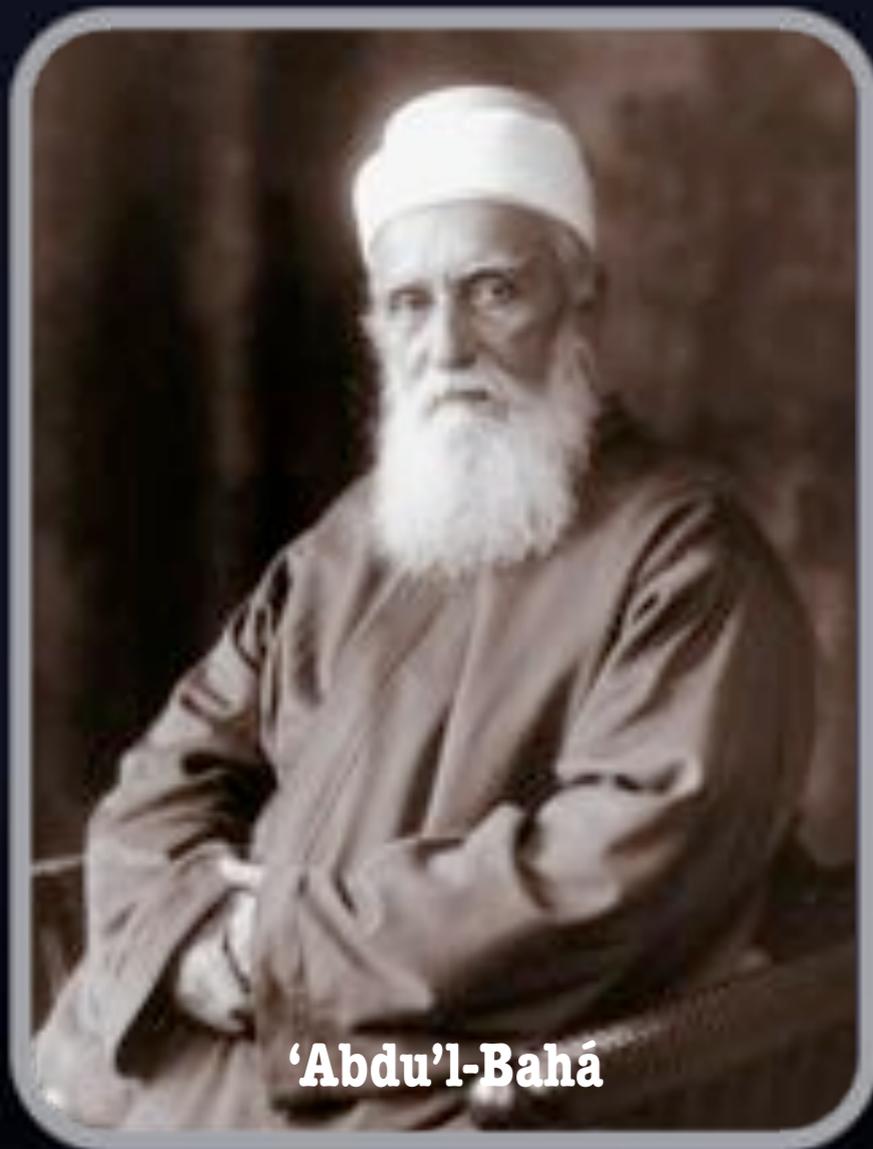
33 (Selected) Bahá'í Principles

- (1) human unity; (2) social justice; (3) racial harmony; (4) interfaith cooperation; (5) gender equality; (6) wealth equity (economic justice); (7) social and economic development; (8) international law; (9) human rights; (10) freedom of conscience; (11) individual responsibility; (12) harmony of science and religion; (13) international scientific cooperation; (14) international standards/world intercommunication; (15) international language; (16) universal education; (17) environmentalism; (18) world commonwealth; (19) world tribunal; (20) world peace; (21) search after truth; (22) oneness of religion; (23) love of God; (24) nobility of character (acquiring virtues); (25) advancing civilization (individual purpose); (26) work as worship; (27) ideal marriage; (28) family values; (29) model communities; (30) religious teleology (Progressive Revelation); (31) Bahá'í doctrinal integrity; (32) Bahá'í institutional support (the "Covenant"); (33) promoting Bahá'í values.



**Bahá'í children's choir at a
1999 Martin Luther King Day
observance in Indiana**

Bahá'í Emancipation/Civil War Myth of America



'Abdu'l-Bahá

(1844–1921)

- On Tuesday morning, April 23, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke in Rankin Chapel at Howard University to well over a thousand faculty, administrators, students, and guests.
- “The first proclamation of emancipation [the Emancipation Proclamation] for the blacks was made by the whites of America. How they fought and sacrificed until they freed the blacks! Then it spread to other places.”
- The Emancipation Proclamation was followed by the Europeans, and had a liberating impact on Africans as well, such that “Emancipation Proclamation became universal.”
- To idealize the Civil War is to mythologize it. Here, 'Abdu'l-Bahá mythologizes the Civil War by essentializing it. This Civil War myth, like most myths, serves as a vehicle of a social and moral truth: the need for interracial unity.

The Bahá'í Wilsonian Myth

- Shoghi Effendi states that Wilson holds a special place as the most honored statesman in the Bahá'í writings:
- To her President, the immortal Woodrow Wilson, must be ascribed the unique honor, among the statesmen of any nation, whether of the East or of the West, of having voiced sentiments so akin to the principles animating the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, and of having more than any other world leader, contributed to the creation of the League of Nations—achievements which the pen of the Center of God's Covenant [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] acclaimed as signaling the dawn of the Most Great Peace.
- In a word, Wilsonian idealism is internationalism.



Pres. Woodrow Wilson



COMMENTARY

Intro, February 1914

On Thursday, November 6, 1913, five colored men and one colored woman of the National Independent Equal Rights League, led by M. W. M. Trotter, presented a national petition, signed by colored Americans in thirty-eight states protesting the segregation of colored employees in the departments of the government. Following is the follow-up conversation between Trotter and Wilson in which Trotter speaks of the humiliation of segregation, and Wilson argues of segregation's benefits.

CONVERSATION, JANUARY, 1915

MR. TROTTER AND MR. WILSON



Monroe Trotter

"Mr. President, we are here to renew our protest against the segregation of colored employees in the departments of our National Government. Mr. President, one year ago the sixth of this month we came before you as a delegation of this same organization, now the National Independent Equal Rights League, and presented a national petition, signed by colored Americans in thirty-eight states, protesting against the segregation of employees of the National Government whose ancestry could

be traced in whole or in part to Africa, as mentioned under your administration. We then appealed to you to undo this race segregation in accord with your duty as President and with your proclamation pledges to colored American voters. We stated that such segregation was a public humiliation and degradation, and entirely unwarranted and far-reaching in its injurious effects, a gratuitous blow against every loyal citizen and against those, many of whom have aided and supported your elevation to the Presidency of our common country." Mr. Trotter named the various departments in which segregation is still in force.

"Since we come to you, Mr. President, by vote of this league, to set before you this definite continuance of race segregation against us a year after you heard our protest and seemed to heed our appeal, to renew the protest and appeal to ask you to entirely abolish segregation of Afro-American employees in the executive department."

What Mr. Wilson Said:

"In reply the President said that after our last visit he and his cabinet officers had investigated as he promised, and cabinet officers told him the segregation was caused by friction between colored and white clerks, and not done to injure or humiliate the colored clerks, but to avoid friction. Members of the cabinet had assured him that the colored clerks would have comfortable conditions, though separated. He had taken their view that the segregation was the best way to meet this situation and that the best thought of the

administration has so decided.

"The white people of this country," the President continued, "as well as I, wish to see the colored people progress, and admire the progress they have already made, and want to see them continue along independent lines. There is, however, a great prejudice against colored people, but as Mr. Spencer says, we are all colored, but I mean those of African descent. It will take one hundred years to eradicate this prejudice, and we must deal with it as practical men. Segregation is not humiliating but a benefit, and ought to be so regarded by you gentlemen. If your organization goes out and tells the colored people of the country that it is a humiliation, they will so regard it, but if you do not tell them so, and regard it rather as a benefit, they will regard it the same. The only harm that will come will be if you cause them to think it is a humiliation."

Mr. Trotter's Reply:

"Mr. President, we did not come to the White House as delegates of the National Independent Equal Rights League protesting the segregation in the attitude of dependent wards of the nation, but as full-fledged American citizens, absolutely equal with all others, to demand our equal rights under the Constitution. It is not in accord with the known facts to claim that the segregation was started because of race friction of the white and colored clerks. The indisputable facts of the situation will not permit of the claim that the segregation is due to the friction. It is unreasonable, in view of the established facts, to maintain that the segregation

"It will take one hundred years to eradicate this prejudice, and we must deal with it as practical men. Segregation is not humiliating but a benefit, and ought to be so regarded by you gentlemen."

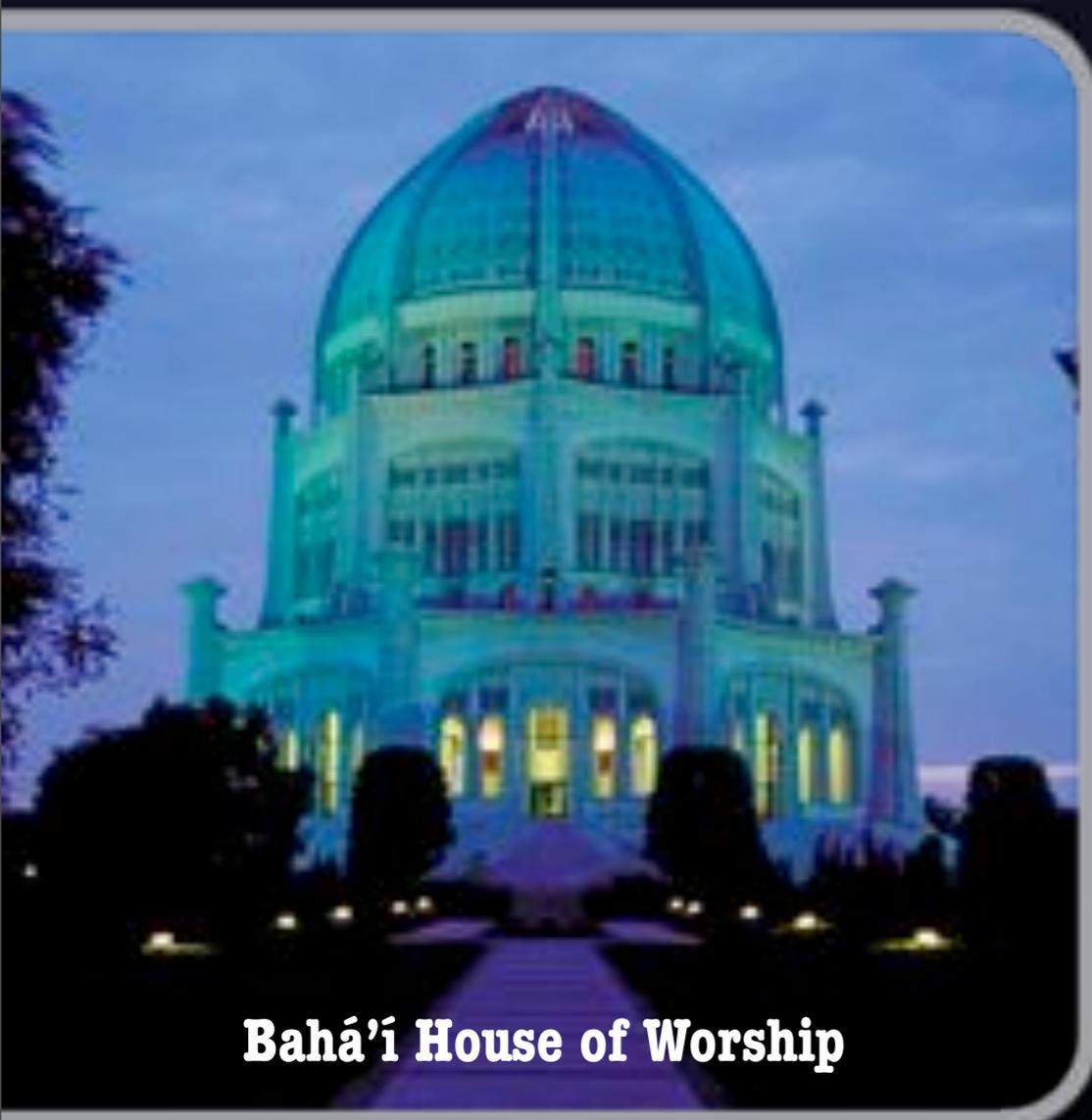
**— Pres. Woodrow Wilson
to Monroe Trotter
Nov. 6, 1913**

The Bahá'í Wilsonian Myth

- “Peace without victory”; self-determination; the equality of states; renunciation of indemnities and annexations; rejection of the balance of power; promotion of the community of powers, of collective security under a league of nations, of a world safe for democracy—these were the principles Wilson enunciated in 1917, and these were the principles that catapulted him into the top ranks of democratic visionaries in world history.
- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá observed: “As to President Wilson, the fourteen principles which he hath enunciated are mostly found in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh and I therefore hope that he will be confirmed and assisted.”
- Bahá’í writings do not idealize Wilson so much as they champion Wilsonian idealism (i.e. internationalism).



The Bahá'í Vision of the Destiny of America



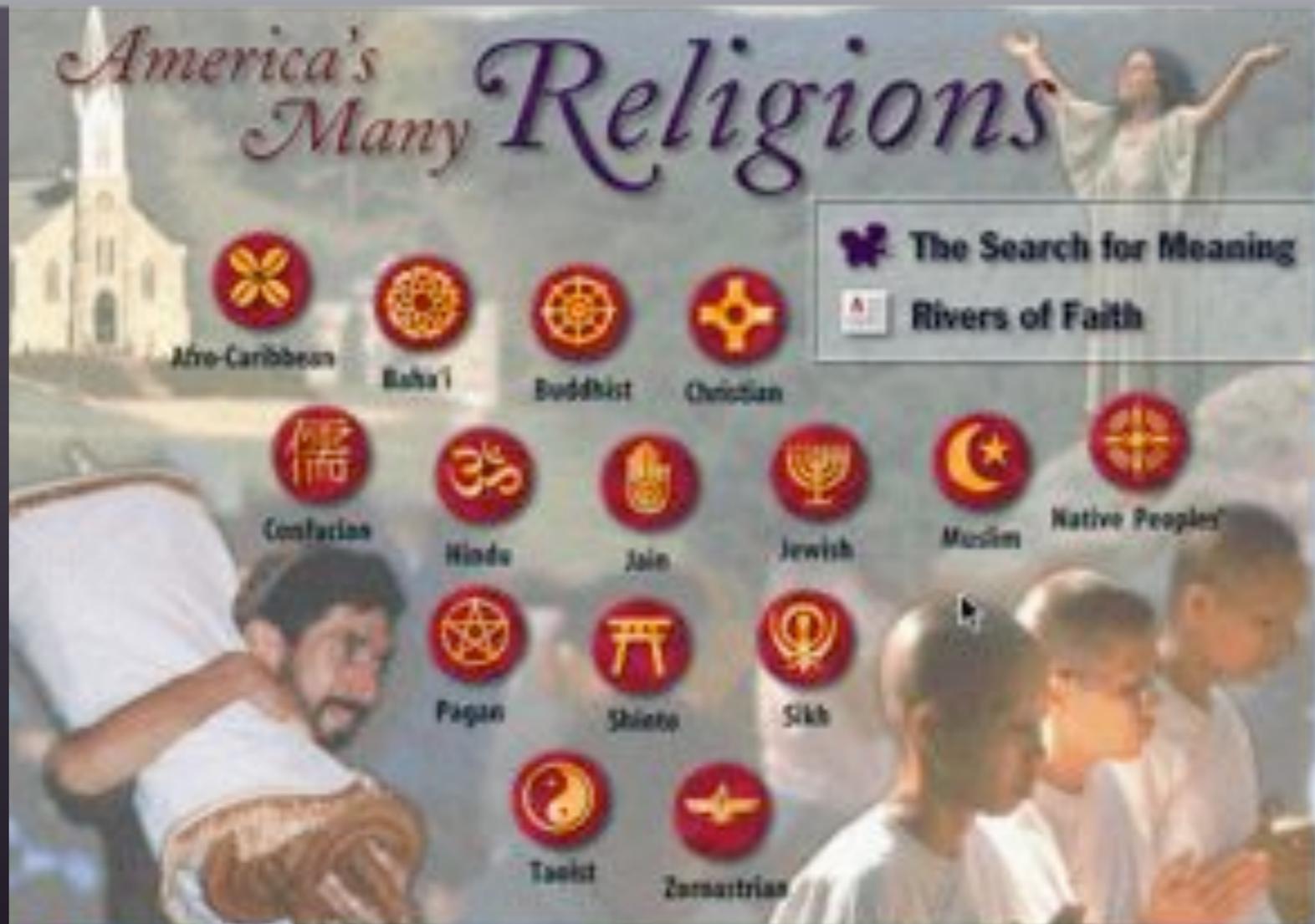
Bahá'í House of Worship

Wilmette, IL

- At a time of national crisis following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the National Spiritual Assembly published a full-page display ad, “The Destiny of America and the Promise of World Peace,” which appeared on page A29 in the New York Times on December 23, 2001.
- This 645-word document highlights six prerequisites for world peace: (1) promoting “universal acceptance” of the oneness of humanity to realize world peace; (2) eradicating racism (“a major barrier to peace”) to achieve racial harmony; (3) fostering “the emancipation of women” to achieve “full equality of the sexes”; (4) greatly reducing the “inordinate disparity between rich and poor”; (5) transcending “unbridled nationalism” and inculcating “a wider loyalty” to “humanity as a whole”; (6) overcoming “religious strife” to enjoy harmony among religions.
- The full-page display ad was later reprinted in dozens of newspapers around the country.

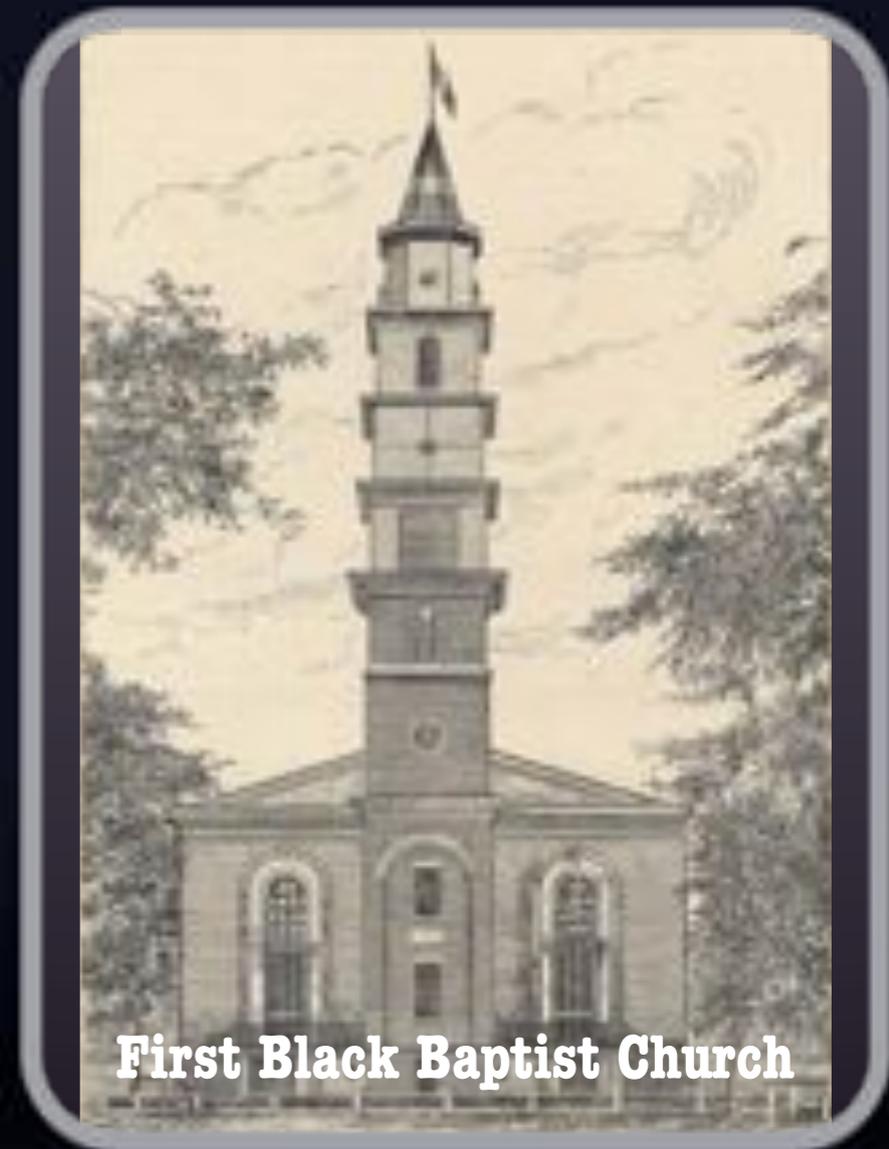
Chapter 12

How Minority Faiths Redefined America's World Role



America's World Role: Native, Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism

- **Native American Religion**: To promote environmental ethics and ecological sustainability throughout “Turtle Island” and beyond. In the heritage of Deganawidah, to advance global democracy in the interests of world peace.
- **Protestantism**: To promote originally Puritan values of liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire. To promote global democracy. To promote “worldwide brotherhood,” as expressed by Dr. Martin Luther King’s vision of “the World House.”
- **Catholicism**: To promote “religious liberty as a basic civil right.” To foster “the growth of international cooperation and solidarity in the service of that peace.”
- **Judaism**: To promote unity and pluralism “uniting all people in peace and freedom.”



First Black Baptist Church

Savannah, GA

America's World Role: Mormonism, Christian Identity, Nation of Islam

- **Mormonism**: To promote liberty and equal rights. To strengthen the foundation of society by fostering family values.
- **Christian Identity**: To preserve the purity of the White race. To establish a Whites-only homeland.
- **Nation of Islam**: To realize America's potential to become the "Kingdom of God on earth" — "an egalitarian kingdom structured on truth, where each . . . will be treated with fairness and justice." However: "It is not a time for integration; it is a time for us to separate from our former slave-masters." (2008)
- **Contemporary Islam**: Radical Islamism: No positive world role for America. (Progressive Islam: No definitive world role for America.)



Latter-Day Saints

Ordaining Male Priest

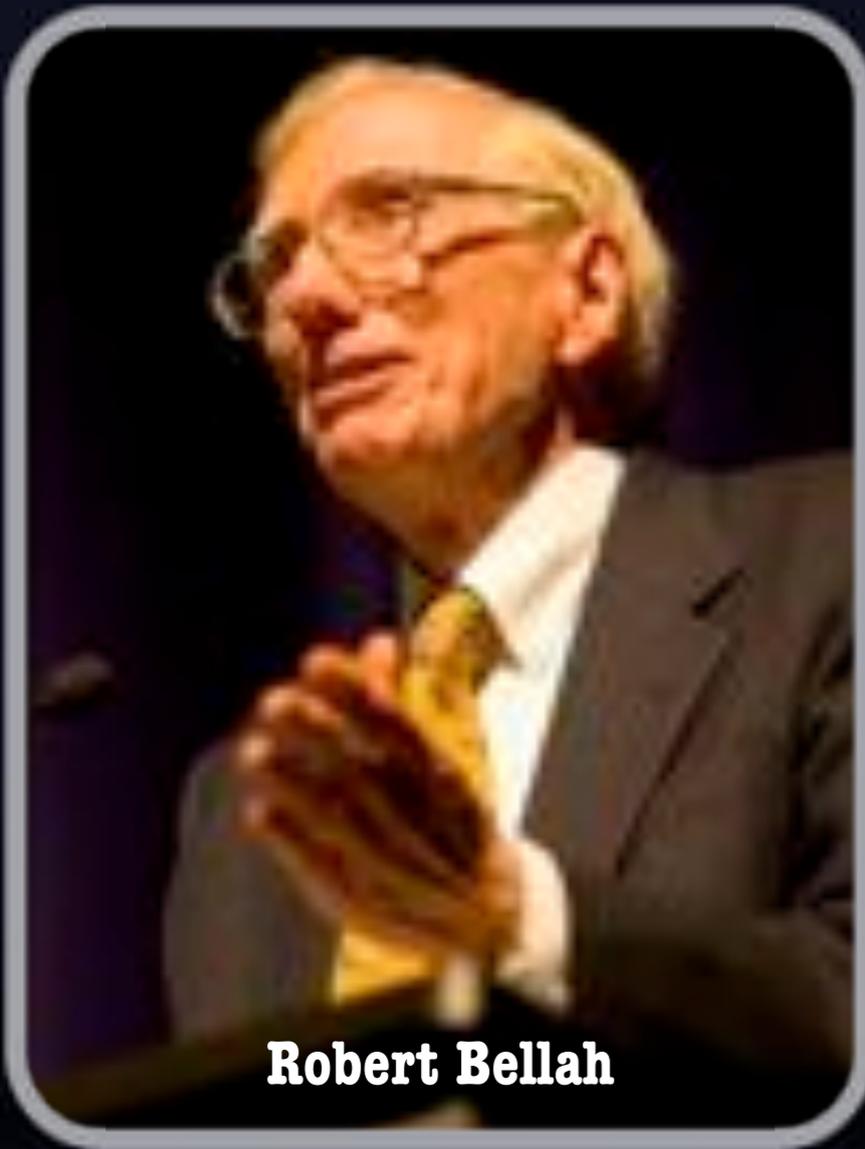
America's World Role: Buddhism & Bahá'í

- **Buddhism:** To “bring those same fundamental rights and freedoms to people living under totalitarian regimes” and “to make this world straight.” (Dalai Lama.) To cultivate “a renaissance and enlightenment science [of] our times.” (Robert Thurman.) To promote a “Buddhist Democracy.” (Dalai Lama, Thurman, Ikeda.)
- **Bahá'í Faith:** America will “lead all nations spiritually” in order to “unify the world.” “Only then will that great republic . . . continue to evolve, undivided and undefeatable, until the sum total of its contributions to the birth, the rise and the fruition of that world civilization, the child of the Most Great Peace and hallmark of the Golden Age of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, will have been made, and its last task discharged.”

**Bahá'í Youth & Children
First Day of Ridván 2010
Savannah, GA**



A World Civil Religion?



Robert Bellah

- Dean Hoge, sociologist at Catholic University of America, has outlined three types of civil visions of America, the first two of which clearly have American Protestant origins: (1) Exemplarism; (2) Vindicationism; and (3) Cosmopolitanism.
- “A third vision of America’s mission calls for internationalism based not on messianic ideas but on a posture of openness and cooperation.” Hoge connects this third ideal with Robert Bellah’s ideal of a “world civil religion.”
- “A world civil religion,” Bellah concludes in his celebrated essay, “Civil Religion in America” (1967), is a world-embracing vision that “could be accepted as a fulfillment and not as a denial of American civil religion”—as “the eschatological hope of American civil religion from the beginning.”

America's World Role: Visions Realized?

- **When will the noblest myths of America have become reality and their grandest visions realized?**
- **In the immortal words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., it will be when America will “transform this world-wide neighborhood into a world-wide brotherhood.”**
- **And, in one Bahá'í text, America will have fulfilled its destiny when “the oneness of the whole body of nations will be made the ruling principle of international life.”**



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



THE END

Thank you for participating in this workshop.