RACE, RELIGION AND CULTURE IN AMERICA'S DEVELOPMENT

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NOTICE

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Dr. Max Lerner, Professor of American Civilization, Brandeis University, and Syndicated Columnist, New York Post, was born in Minsk, Russia, in 1902. He came to the United States in 1907. He received his A. B. degree fromYale in 1923, his A. M. from Washington University, St. Louis in 1925, and his Ph. D. from Roberts Brookings Graduate School of Economics and Government, Washington, D. C., in 1927. He was Assistant Editor, Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences in 1927 and later, Managing Editor. During the years 1932-1941 he taught at Sarah Lawrence College, Williams College and Harvard University. From 1936-1938 he was Editor of the "Nation." From 1943-1948 he was a radio commentator. He became a columnist, "New York Star" in 1948. In 1949 he assumed the duties of Professor of American Civilization, Brandeis University and as a worldwide syndicated columnist for the New York Post, the positions he currently holds. He has traveled widely as a journalist and scholar in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. He recently spent a year teaching in India, at the University of New Delhi. He is a noted author. Among his published works are: "It is Later than you Think" (1938), "Ideas are Weapons" (1939), "Ideas for the Ice Age" (1941), "The Mind and Faith of Justice Holmes" (1943), "Public Journal" (1945), "Actions and Passions" (1949), "America as a Civilization" (1957), and "The Unfinished Country" (1959), "Education and a Radical Humanism (1962). His newest book "The Age of Overkill," which is subtitled "A Preface to World Politics" was published in December 1962. This is Dr. Lerner's second lecture at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

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GENERAL SCHOMBURG: Ladies, with your presence here we have the prettiest audience we have had in a long time. We think you are going to enjoy tonight; as a matter of fact I know you are. You know what the subject matter is, you have a program and I would like to tell you that we spent a great deal of time in choosing tonight's speaker. Many of us participated. We had many, many fine speakers and the selection was not easy, but when we decided we knew we had just the man for you. You will find him most interesting, provocative and I will not cover his biography; your husbands all have that. I know by the time you start home you are going to want to know more about it and you can ask them then. Dr. Lerner does not know this but I think I will put in a plug for a book of his. "The Age of Overkill" and when you hear him tonight I am sure that many of you will want to see this book. We have it in our library or maybe Dr. Lerner would like to have you buy it. So I give you a distinguished scholar, educator, and journalist: Dr. Max Lerner.

DR. LERNER: General Schomburg, Ladies and Gentlemen, the president of my university tells me that when you get presented as generously as I have just been presented to you by General Schomburg, the best thing to do is take it. He says it is better to have a little taffy while you are still alive than a lot of epitaph after you are dead. I am grateful for this bit of taffy while I am still alive.

On one of the college campuses on which I spent part of my misspent life I recall a story we used to have about a colleague of ours. The story went that he dreamt once that he was lecturing to his class and woke up to find that he was. A good deal of what we do in our modern world is done somnambulistically. A great French philosopher Andre' Bergson was once asked to deliver a paper to a Congress of Philosophers. He was not able to do the paper but he sent a message. The message consisted of a single

sentence. The sentence read: "Act as men of thought, think as men of action." This is imperative still for all of us; to make our decisions, whatever they may be, within the context of reflective thinking; but to do our thinking with a knowledge of the consequences of our ideas. It is from this double perspective that I want to talk to you on the theme you have suggested.

I have recently been rereading the great classic on the American Civilization, written a long time ago by a young Frenchman called Alex de Toqueville. In 1831 two young Frenchmen, De Tocqueville and Gustave Beaumont, came to the United States for a visit. They felt that America represented a great hope for the future. But they also felt it was a great laboratory from which the Europeans could derive enlightenment about their own problems, and they came here to study in this laboratory. They stayed for 8 months, and then De Tocqueville spent the next 9 years of his life mulling over what he had seen here. Out of it came democracy in America.

You will find in it a classic chapter on "The Three Races in America," the European, the Indians, and the African slaves. He felt that we had done a cruel thing to the Indians: in other parts of the new world they had been destroyed with the sword; we had done it in a subtler way--by "civilizing" them and by process of law, nevertheless we pretty much destroyed them. About the African slaves he had some other things to say that I shall come to soon. I have said that De Tocqueville came to America with a feeling of great hope, but he did not integrate it with his discussion of the three races, which seems to stand out from the rest.

His hopefulness came from his belief that we in America represented the great democratic revolution of the future, which the Europeans were bound to follow. He felt a degree of inevitability about it. But he also felt that we had found a way of carrying through the democratic revolution without destructiveness, without violence, without religious wars, without racial wars, without class wars, and he wondered whether it would be possible for Europe to learn from the American experience. As a young aristocrat, he rather dreaded the revolution he saw coming in Europe, a revolution which he felt had to come. But as a sensitive person who cared about the life of the mind, he also hoped the Europeans would be able to carry it through without destructiveness. He felt that religion in America had played a very crucial role because it was a force which kept the revolutionary

energies of the American people from turning in upon themselves destructively.

Here was a new country without an aristocracy, without therefore any code-making group that could tell the population as a whole, as the European aristocrats told their masses, what to do and how to do it. Here was a new country where the people themselves had to make the codes. Tocqueville felt that this could result in anarchy, and his feeling about religion in America was that it prevented the anarchy from arising. Religion was one of the ways in which codes were made and maintained. But he felt there was another religion in America, even more important than the church religions. He did not quite find a name for it, but he spent considerable time describing it. I have myself called it "Civic Religion." Tocqueville was speaking of the American feeling of commitment to institutions, a feeling of participation in the life of their communities, a feeling of respect for the fabric of political and institutional life. He found this particularly true in New England, but he found it true elsewhere as well. Whereas in Europe the Catholic clergy were deeply committed to the fusion of church and state, Tocqueville noted that in America the Catholics respected the separation of church and state. They had become, he felt, infected by the climate of opinion in the country as a whole. He gave this as an example of what Montesquieu, his great teacher, had called "the spirit of the law," and the extent to which the spirit of the institutions characterized the nation as a whole. With great prescience Tocqueville saw how rapidly Catholicism would grow in America, but he felt also that its growth would be maintained within the general framework of the spirit of American institutions.

About the American Negroes Tocqueville feared a great disaster awaited us, that we would have to pay heavily in reaping the harvest of what we had sown. He thought the disaster would come after the slaves had been freed. He said that only after a people gets its freedom, only after it learns the taste of a different life, does it begin to make demands for total equality. As a result of these demands of the Negroes Tocqueville foresaw a bloody struggle between blacks and whites, one that would take place in the Southern States where the slavery institution was strongest. This bloody struggle that he spoke of--he really meant a bloody one--has not taken place. Yet the prescience was there. Thus we see how the American tradition was operating in the eyes of perhaps the most subtle and acute observer of American life and institutions.

* * *

I want to give a few definitions now before I go on. I use "race" only for the broadest possible categories of physical anthropology, that is, when we speak of the blacks, the whites, the Indians, the Orientals. Our present thinking about race is still in a searching state; we still do not know what "race" means. The present tendency is to talk of it in terms of a chemical constituent in blood type--that it has very little to do actually with physiogenomy, and certainly little to do with either inferiority or superiority of psychological traits.

I use "stock" to indicate certain physical characteristics the way the anthropometrists would measure them. I use "nationality" to mean country of origin. There are Americans of various nationalities in the sense that they or their ancestors come from various countries. In that sense we are of English, or Italian, or Polish, or Japanese in origin. I use "religion," of course, to mean the broad categories--the Protestants, the Catholics, the Jews, the Muslims, whatever else it may be. And, I use the term "ethnic group" as the term we use most frequently to mean a combination of the other concepts, usually both country of origin and religion. Thus the Irish Catholics, the Italian Catholics, the Mexican Catholics, the African Negro, the Russian Jews, the German Jews, even the Negro Jews or Jewish Negroes.

You probably know the golf story about Sammy Davis, who is a Jewish Negro. The man he was playing with said, "Sammy, what is your handicap?," and Sammy answers, "Look! I am a Negro, I am a Jew, and I have only one eye, and you ask me what is my handicap." I have sometimes wondered who would be the most ethnically handicapped person in the United States--perhaps a Negro-Jewish woman with some Indian-Mexican blood in her. But she could also have built-in rationalization for the adversities in her life. The unhappiest person is a WASP--White Anglo-Saxon Protestant--because whatever happens to him he must attribute to his own defects and not to any minority status. These "Wasps" tend to develop a special neurosis, since they must assign to their personal inadequacy what they cannot project upon their membership in any group. One other term. When I speak of "culture" and "subculture," I speak of American "culture," I mean the culture of the country as a whole. A "subculture" may be the culture of a particular ethnic group.

Now a few personal words. I have spoken of de Tocqueville's America--that of 1831 at the time of Jackson. I want to say a few words about the America I was brought to. I was born in Russia, and was brought over as a 4-year-old child, in 1907. It was at the height of the great immigration wave at the first decade of the 20th century. My father came over 4 years before the rest of the family, so that he could earn enough to bring over the rest of us. He got about $4.00 a week during most of those years, and in his last year he was making $12.00 a week. We came over on steerage, of course; I can remember bedding down on the floor against whatever few possessions we had. We were met at Ellis Island by our relatives, and were inducted into the larger culture of America. It was a tragic experience for many immigrants like this little family of ours. Someday I should like to write some of my memories of those early years.

Something to remember is that much of what has given tragic depth to American life, and much of the struggle which characterizes the whole of American history comes from this immigrant experience. I can recall the cleavage between myself and my family as I grew up because they remained in the subculture they had brought over from the Jewish communities in Russia. I went through high school and spent 5 years at Yale. It was a college with a tradition of great gentility. I studied mostly English literature. I remember being taken aside toward the end of my senior year by one of my favorite professors. He knew that I wanted to teach English literature at one of the universities. He said to me rather sadly but quite candidly, "I don't think you ought to go on with this; you might as well face the fact that in the Ivy League colleges at the present time--given your origin, your religion--you are not going to have an easy time. It is going to be a real struggle. If I were you I would not try it; I would try something else." I heeded him (I don't know whether I should have) so I went off to some other things--to law school and graduate work in economics.

This was 90 years after Tocqueville. It was just 40 years ago, and the anti-Jewish feeling I have described was still considerable. If I may jump 40 years to the present, that would not be true now in any American university. There are few American colleges of any quality left which still have a taboo on religious belief and ethnic membership for the faculty. Actually the Jews today represent a considerable part of the American intellectual elite. At a time when the scientific humanist elite is very much in demand, and

at a time when America must either win the intelligence race or resign itself to a secondary position in the world, there is no room for ethnic taboos. We have gone a long way, at least in that respect.

* * *

Now as the main part of my talk, I shall say what I am going to say in the form of a series of propositions.

(1) America is a pluralistic civilization--pluralistic ethnically, culturally, politically, economically. This is part of our glory. Walt Whitman said "We are not just a nation, we are a nation of nations." I hope we will remain a nation of nations.

(2) Much of our national strength comes from this pluralism. You do not find in America, as you find in so many countries, the population divided into two strata--first, those who had been there originally and were conquered, and secondly, the conquerers. The only conquered in our society are the Indians, and there are not many of them left. The Negroes were conquered in a different way; they were brought here in chains, and they still form part of the underlying strata. I say that much of our strength derives from this pluralism because it shows both the world and ourselves that we have been able to resolve the basic test of democracy. After all, what is the basic test? It is not whether a homogenous people can live together without murdering each other; it is whether a people who are not homogenous can do it--whether it can be done that way in a city like New York or Chicago or San Francisco.

In Europe this has not been true. The whole of European history is a blood-soaked history, the history of man's inhumanity to man, brother against brother in political, religious, and racial conflict, ending up with the genocide of millions of Jews at the hands of the Nazi regime. That was the climax of the long story of what we would now call the lack of "consensus," which is now being demonstrated in Africa. The amazing thing in America has been the presence of consensus between very disparate people.

Also, we are showing the rest of the world how we resolve these problems, and this is of great importance in the era of nuclear politics. The nuclear weapons we are making and stockpiling cannot be used. We do not dare stop making them, but we do not dare use them, and quite rightly, just as the Russians do not dare use them. The result is that the meaningful struggle

between the Western power-cluster and the Communist power-cluster is what I call political war. It is a struggle of aid and trade, of diplomacy and Peace Corps, of ideas and ideals. It is a struggle of intelligence. This political war must continue for some time until we have been able to create some kind of world policing force which can nail down the peace. Until that time we have to use the best weapons we can in the political struggle. In that struggle we are being tested and judged and valued all around the world by the kind of image of a living democracy that we present.

We speak of the nuclear weapons as "credible" weapons, we speak of our deterrent as a "credible" deterrent. It had better be credible: the others had better believe in it. But there must also be a credible democracy, a credible society. The fact is that in these pluralistic terms, we have tolerably made our society credible, although we still have a long way to go.

(3) We do not have in America any exclusive "American stock," as against "foreign stock." We sometimes tend to use the terms "American" and "foreign" to suggest degrees of recency of immigration. Although my family and I have been here only since 1907, I feel as deeply American as those whose families came over in the early 1600's. In a pluralistic society, where there are no native Americans except for the Indians, the question of whether one is "American" depends not upon origin but upon the way one has lived and the kind of commitment he has made.

This recalls an interesting experience I had. I worked on one of Marshall Field's newspapers once, and I had a chance to see something of him. I helped him on a book and so he mentioned me in the Foreword. A reviewer on one of the New York newspapers, noticing my name in the Foreword used a rather interesting sentence. He said (I am paraphrasing):

> It is curious that Mr. Lerner and Mr. Field should have worked together on this book, curious because when Mr. Field's ancestors were merchant princes in Chicago, Mr. Lerner's ancestors were wandering on the steppes of Russia. Mr. Lerner is a transient in this country. We ought to make a distinction between those who are real residents of the hotel and those who are just transient guests.

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He added that he himself, as an Irish Catholic, was also a transient guest. I did not exactly appreciate this, because I felt as much a part of the house of America as anyone else. The question of whether we are American, as I say, does not depend on when we came here. As another American immigrant has put it, "Who can know America who has known only America?" One needs a standard of comparison, and with it one can understand the differences--the greater freedom, the tolerance, the acceptance, life-chances. When I say then that there are no Americans, I am really saying that the concept of "Americanism" is ethnically a shaky, puzzling and questionable concept. It applies only if you are talking of genuine commitment to America.

(4) The immigration quotas that we began to adopt in the 1920's, and that are still on the statute books, are irrevelant to any meaningful American experience, because they apply to country of origin. They were set in such a way that they would discriminate against immigrants from East Europe and others, and would favor immigrants from West Europe. I agree with the necessity for immigration restrictions in purely numerical terms. There is a little book by the late President Kennedy called "A Nation of Immigrants," which takes a very strong position in the terms that I am describing. We can decide to take so many immigrants each year, but the test of who should be admitted in that number should not be a test of what country they came from, or what their religion is, or what their color is. It should be, first, a test of their educational achievements and capacity; second, of their skills as against the skills we need; third, in terms of their character and commitment.

(5) A new American stock is emerging, slowly, but emerging. When I say this I mean that differential physical characteristics among the various ethnic groups are narrowing. More and more we find ourselves moving toward what may eventually become a more homogenous stock in physical terms, than what we have at the present time. This is a result partly of intermarriage and interbreeding, partly of climate and diet and living standards. Franz Boas, the great anthropologist, did a famous study on the sons and daughters of immigrants after the families had been here for some time. He found that even in physical terms they had markedly changed. Add the impact of the spread of intermarriage, and the result is that we are moving toward what we may ultimately someday call an American stock.

Yet I would say--and this is my sixth proposition--that we are still a pluralistic nation and will remain that way a long time. We probably have an advantage over cultures which do not have the same degree of pluralism, the same richness of potential biological strength to draw upon as of cultural strength. Each of the immigrant groups that came to this country from the beginning was like a river carrying its own cultural freightage into the common sea of American life. This, along with the biological richness, had lead to creativeness in American life. If you take, for example, what has happened to Spain since the 15th century, when it chose to expel some of its most creative stock and if you compare it with what has happened to America, you get at least one of the consequences that has flowed from this diversity of ours.

(7) It is not desirable that the various cultural groups should become assimilated. I do not believe in Americanization in the sense of assimilation. Israel Zangwill once wrote a book called "The Melting Pot," and for some time we felt that immigrant groups should go in to the melting pot and become "Americanized." The best thinking today does not go along with that. We tend to think today that each individual American ought to be a member of the larger American culture, but that he should also retain his sense of identity in his subculture, whatever it be. Instead of assimilation we now speak of integration.

I may give an example of what I mean. I said a moment ago that for some time I felt a sense of distance between myself and my family. I do not think that was healthy. I was moving away from them, away from the roots I had in their great tradition, I wanted to put roots down in the American cultural tradition; that much was right. But to put roots down in the American soil did not mean that I had to tear up the roots I had in the tradition of my fathers. There were many of those who tore up their roots and found themselves alienated, torn away, with a sense of emptiness--and who felt bruised by the whole experience. A good many of the problems of mental health in America come either from these conflicts or from the lack of genuine roots. As I went on, going back to my family and its cultural, religious, and historical tradition, I found that this was happening to my whole generation. It is an experience which the American historians recognize as characterizing many of the third generation--in my own case second generation, but mostly the third generation.

I would say that this distinction between assimilation and integration is a crucial distinction for all of us to understand. It is true of Scandinavian Americans, Polish Americans, Irish Americans, and Jewish Americans.

When we speak of Negro "integration," we use the term in a somewhat different sense. But I hope that ultimately we will be using it in the same sense. If I were a Negro I should want very much to have the same privileges, rights, and opportunities as all other Americans. But I should not want to abandon my own subculture. I should not want to tear up the roots that I have in the soil of my Negro ancestors and their cultural tradition. The trouble is that the Negro today is having to fight so hard for equal opportunities that in many cases he has become alienated from his own culture. He is still recognizable because of his skin but he has become alienated from his culture.

(8) In the case of the Jews there is a very genuine danger of their extinction as a subculture in America. Many Jewish leaders are deeply worried about it. I am not. I have the sense of my identity as a Jew. It is the window through which I look out at the larger house of American life and thought. But while I do not have these worries I understand those who do. They still remember that 6 million of their brothers and sisters were destroyed during the thirties and forties. They know there is still a great murderousness toward them in many parts of the world. They do not like to feel that, through intermarriage and through the loss of the Jewish faith, they face the possible extinction of the Jewish community in the United States. The Catholics are able to maintain a good deal of their identity partly through their religious rules. The Jews do not have that kind of religious control. They have to rely upon social pressures in order to maintain a certain continuing degree of cohesiveness. Fundamentally I do not myself believe that the avoidance of intermarriage is a crucial condition of the continuance of the sense of identity. To me intermarriage is a part of the expanding horizons of our world. It has characterized American life from the beginning, and I would say that the problem of identity will now have to be a problem that each individual has to face. He has to find his roots where he can, and he must not feel that he has torn those roots simply because of the freedom of marriage choice which is one of the great institutions of America.

(9) I now come to another problem, of creativeness. A good part of the creativeness in the intellectual and scientific, educational,

economic, political and military life in America has come from qualities that were brought to this country by the immigrant groups from diverse cultures and by the intermingling of the cultures and the intermingling of the stocks. Take the case of the Protestants. The "Protestant ethic" in the sense of the Calvinist tradition of salvation by "vocation" or calling--what you choose to do with your life as shown by the proofs or witness of your life--this Protestant ethic is integral to American culture. In the sense of self-dicipline, in the dignity of work, in the role it has played in the building of the structure of business enterprize, the Protestant ethic has become a part of the spirit of American institutions. It has recently been suggested that we have lost the basic characteristics of the Protestant ethic. I think this may be so. Hence, one of the themes in my own writing is that the most valuable elements of this ethic must be recaptured.

I feel deeply, for example, that we have lost our sense of the meaning of work. We now talk and think in terms of the "job." The job is something you try to get as much for as you can, to give as little to as you can, to get away from as soon as you are through. That is the job. Work is something very different. Work is something you do because you could no more help doing it than you could help breathing. It is something that fulfills you, something for which you do not keep a time clock, something to which you have a commitment. Work had this meaning once in the Protestant ethic, and we lost it. We need to find it again.

The great creativeness of the Catholics in America has been the human warmth that some of the Catholic groups--the Italians, the Irish and others--have brought with them, as against the dourness of the Calvinist strain. It includes political skills they brought with them, the sense of continuity they have in their religious tradition, their sense of the family as a web and of society as a web. These are very valuable in the whole American tradition.

The creativeness of the Jews in turn is interesting. Thorstein Veblen from whom I learned a good deal, has an essay called "The Intellectual Pre-eminence of the Jews in Western Europe," in which he asks a rather interesting question:

> Why is it that a people whose numbers are so small, in terms of the total numbers, and who have been driven around the world so persistently by persecution, have achieved positions of intellectual pre-eminence in Western Europe?

The answer he gives is an interesting one. He says that because of their persecution they have been marginal people in each culture--both in and of the culture and yet not of it, only on the margin of it. Because they have been marginal people they have had a double angle of vision. They have had the angle of vision both of their own long intellectual tradition as the People of the Book and of their tragic history. But also, they have had the angle of vision of the culture in which they have settled and of which they have become an integral part. From this double angle of vision they have been able to see things with a greater detachment than some of the others have.

This is Veblen's explanation. I find it on the whole not bad. I think that they have also had scars, resulting from persecutions, alienation, the sense of enstrangement from the majority cultures. The creativeness, I think, has been real. It has come partly from this marginal man aspect, and partly from having been part of the tradition of the life of the mind. May I say here as a footnote, that the two great traditions of the life of the mind in America were the tradition of the Puritans and the tradition of the Jews, both of whom came here as People of the Book.

A good part of American history has been one in which the life of the mind has not been respected. There have been long stretches in America of anti-intellectualism, as witnessed by Richard Hofstadter's book "Anti-intellectualism in American Life." It is worth reading because it traces the sources from which this anti-intellectualism sprang, the points at which it grew. Recently we have had to move away from anti-intellectualism toward a greater concern for the life of the mind. We no longer talk--as we talked only a decade ago or 15 years ago--of "eggheads" with contemp and derision. We now seek them out. Every President has to ask himself whether he has enough eggheads around in the White House. We depopulate whole university campuses and bring them there. May I say that even the Secretary of Defense has his own group of eggheads around him, about whom there are diverse opinions, as I understand it, in some of the strata of the defense services.

What has happened in American life, as what has happened elsewhere, is that we have found out that even a democracy has to have elites. I go back here to Thomas Jefferson who, in a letter to John Adams, said that no democracy like America could survive unless it could develop (and I quote) "an aristocracy of virtue and talent" note, he did not say a privileged aristocracy, not an

aristocracy of race, color, or religion, of wealth or heredity or blood or descent, but of virtue and talent--that is to say, of character and ability.

We are now developing two types of elite. One I call the commanding elite: I mean the creative groups who have positions of power, whether it be in the Government or the military in corporations or trade unions or wherever else. The other I call the intellectual elites--those who deal with science, with the word, with ideas. It is important in a democracy that we should develop both, and it is important that they should not despise each other, that they should be hospitable to each other, that they should accept and respect each other and work with each other. It is important that both of these elites should never tear up the roots that they have in the soil of the people from which they come.

* * *

I come now to the end of what I wanted to say. I have tried to indicate a series of propositions of what I thought were strengths, some of the problems came from this pluralistic culture and the subcultures of ours. I would also like to indicate now some of the decisiveness in American life which flows from our failure to resolve the problems of living together.

We have, I think, pretty well resolved the problem of separation of church and state. We have a double wall of separation--at one end the state must not try to control the churches, and at the other end the churches must not try to intrude into the area of nonreligious life. It is crucial that we should remember both these walls that separate church and state. Some of the conflicts that arise come from the fact that we won't always live up to that.

There have been some serious religious conflicts in America. We have a history of anti-Catholicism, especially in the 19th century, with the Know-Nothing movement. We have a history of anti-Semitism that I spoke of a while ago. There was a period in our lives, especially during the rise of Hitler to power in Europe, before we got involved in that showdown conflict with the Germans and the Japanese, when I had real doubts as to whether the future of the Jews in America might not be a very dark one--real doubts as to whether the shadow of Hitlerism that had been cast upon so much of Europe might not also be cast upon America.

Today, of course, those doubts have been resolved. Anti-Catholicism has almost vanished. Mr. Kennedy's election was not only important in showing that a Catholic could be elected President. It was even more important in the way in which he administered his high office. There had been many doubts as to how a Catholic in the White House would behave in terms of his Catholic allegiance, as to whether the religious allegiance would also have political implications. One of the triumphs of Mr. Kennedy's tenure of his Presidential office was that he showed that one could be a Catholic in the White House with no political implications in that Catholicism. I think that question has now been settled, just as I think that the breaking of the anti-Catholic taboo will make it easier to break the anti-Jewish taboo. I think it will be possible to have a Jew in the White House at some point. It is still in the realm of political imagination as to whether there will ever be a Negro in the White House, but it is in no sense excluded. It is largely a question of the developing role of the Negroes in both of the elites I have mentioned. At the present time there are relatively few of them in the commanding elite.

One other thing has helped in the settling of the Catholic problem politically--revolution of the Vatican itself. One of the great men of modern history was Pope John XXIII, followed by Paul VI. The revolution in the Vatican is one of the great revolutions of our time. The Church Councils have recently been tussling with a number of problems--that of religious freedom inside the Catholic Church, that of democratization of power inside of the church, that of modernization in terms of marriage and of contraception, that of the attitude of the Catholics toward the Jews on the question of deicide. In all these ways there has been a modernization revolution within Catholicism which has, I think, pretty much disposed of the problem of anti-Catholicism.

Something has happened in place of these that Professor Will Henberg calls "the three-religion culture." It is a rather interesting concept--that what has been emerging in America is not a state religion but an almost official nonstate triad of religions. We now have a trifle culture of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. In ideal terms there is tolerance between them, although it does not always work out. There has been a movement within each of the three, even in theological terms, toward a certain consensus. It is a movement that has some of the theologians of each of these three faiths a little disheartened because they feel that there should be sharper differentiations of dogma between them. But it is a very

interesting thing for me to observe, because as I think back to what I was saying awhile ago about de Tocqueville, and reflect that we are in effect developing in America a new civic religion, there again it makes de Tocqueville's insight a remarkable one. If he was right in saying that the continuance of our democracy would depend upon building a civic religion, I think we are achieving it.

Just a few words now on something I have kept for the end. because it is so important. It has to do with civil rights movement and the place of the Negro in American life. There has been continued discrimination toward the Negro. The civil rights struggle is an effort to resolve that discrimination and to end it. I want to suggest a point of view toward the civil rights struggle which is not usually given in the press. I suggest that the violence of the civil rights struggle--violence which perhaps could not have been avoided, for the struggle is a crucial one--is due only partly to the fact that the Negroes live in poverty and the slums. This is the usual liberal interpretation. Presumably if we were to do away with poverty and the slums we would be able to resolve the civil rights struggle. I do not believe it. I think we have to do away with poverty and the slums for many human reasons, both for poor Negroes and poor whites. But the problem is a much more radical one. The real struggle arises from the fact that the Negroes have begun for the first time in our history to win their rights. It arises as it were from the improvement in conditions. As the conditions improve there are rising expectations that the gap between where they are now and where they must eventually go--that gap will have to be bridged. In other words, as long as I am kept in subjection I may in part and for a time habituate myself to it. But once I begin getting my partial rights I can no longer tolerate not having the rest of them.

This is where we are in America today. The result is that the slow improvement in the conditions of Negroes, however important, is not going to end the struggle. Let us fact it: the struggle will continue until Negro Americans are on a complete equality, legal and de facto, with white Americans. I am speaking not of his private personal relations but of his public position. I cannot imagine why it should be any different from that of the whites in any part of the country.

To me the outlook of a young Negro American today, whether in the South or in the North, is very bleak. True, he has been getting some of the things he has wanted; he has a better job than

before, he has rising living standards, he has a better house to live in, he may have somewhat better schooling and medical facilities. But the fact is that he does not have the same opportunities that the others have. He feels, therefore, a sense of enstrangement from the culture that denies these opportunities to him, particularly since he finds in Africa that his fellow Negroes have been able to win their freedom and set up new governments as the result of struggle. For that reason he is determined to go on.

I want to interpret this in terms of a basic concept that I have about American life. Here if you will allow me I want to get a little autobiographical. I was coming back from a trip to the Middle East about 7 or 8 years ago. I stopped off in Warsaw. I wanted to see an Iron Curtain Country--at that time I could not get into Russia. I spent a little time in Warsaw with some of the Polish journalists, intellectuals and professors. They had a meeting for me.

I remember the Chairman got up and he said, "Mr. Lerner, you have written this big book on American civilization. Could you tell us in a single word what is the essence of American civilization?" I said, "This is a book of a thousand pages and you want me to distill it into one word." He said, "That is right, in one word, what is American Civilization?" Have you ever had anyone throw that at you?

I thought hard and fast. What is it? Is it freedom? Is it equality? Is it democracy? Is it tolerance? Is it decency? Is it dynamism? Of course, it was all of these. But suddenly I heard myself saying "access." The Chairman laughed. He said, "Mr. Lerner, we have heard of American success, but we have not heard of American access." I said, "You see, we have a Declaration of Independence which says 'that all men are born free and equal'. I hope we are all born free and will remain free. But we are not born equal. We are born very unequal. We are born with unequal potential, and unequal abilities. Every school teacher knows this, every employer knows it, every Army commander knows it, every parent knows it. I have six children of my own and every one of them was born unequal. They have unequal abilities and potentials. But we have the notion in America that there ought to be equal access to equal opportunity so that everyone of these unequally born youngsters will get a chance to develop his unequal abilities to the full. In that sense access is the heart of the American experience."

As I said, we were brought over here, my brothers and sisters and I, in 1907. Why did my parents come here? They had heard that the paving stones in America were made of gold, but that was not why they came here--to get rich. They came here so that their children could breathe freer air. Mostly they came here so that their children could have a chance at a chance. I have had that--an equal chance at an equal chance. My children are having it now. May I say that I will not rest content until every American youngster has the same chance that I have had and that my children are having. I do not often get angry, but I must say I do get angry when I find doors of opportunity that are open for some youngsters slammed in the face of others, when I find road blocks on the road to some that do not exist for others.

When some people tell me that this is part of the tragic condition in life, I say to them "No, do not demean the word 'tragedy' that way." I say to them that tragedy is something deep and noble, part of the very constitution of the universe. We will never do away with tragedy. I tell my students that tragedy is going to hit every one of them, just as it hit me. The difference between people is that tragedy destroys some while it deepens others.

Tragedy is part of the constitution of the universe both in the life of individuals and in the life of nations. But there is a difference between the tragic and the pathetic. Pathos is man made, and because it is man made it can be man resolved. Poverty is pathetic, not tragic. Slums are pathetic, not tragic. Religious bigotry is pathetic, not tragic. Racial discrimination is pathetic, not tragic. The lack of access for some Americans, when others have access, is pathetic, not tragic.

I give you a country of possibility, in which we can resolve some of these things. People say to me, "Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future?" I say, "Look, this is not a question of whether I am bullish or berish on Wall Street. I am neither an optimist nor a pessimist about the future: I am a possibilist."

I believe it is possible for us to fulfill the vision we had originally, of a pluralistic American society in which there were equal chances for all, in which there is no exclusive Americanism, no exclusive religion, no exclusive race, and no exclusiveness of ethnic groups, but in which there is the civic religion I speak of. To say these things are possible does not mean they are guaranteed. I believe we will be able to win the intelligence race against the

world Communist power cluster if we can show this kind of credible American society.

In that sense we can stretch out our hands to claim the future. But if we do not make our society credible, then, something that Adali Stevenson said a while ago may prove true: "There will be other and bloodier hands than ours that stretch out to the future to claim it."

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