

JOSÉ, CAN YOU SEE?

A Service by Fritz Hudson

Presented June 12, 2005

Chalice Lighting

Lift up your eyes

Upon this day breaking for you.

Give birth again

To the dream.

Women, children, men,

Take it into the palms of your hands.

Mold it into the shape of your most

Private need, sculpt it into

The image of your most public self.

Lift up your hearts

Each new hour holds new chances

For a new beginning.

Do not be wedded forever

To fear, yoked eternally

To brutishness.

The horizon leans forward,

Offering you space

To place new steps of change

Here, on the pulse of this fine day.

You may have the courage

To look up and out and upon me,

The Rock, the River, the Tree, your country.

Here on the pulse of this same day

You may have the grace to look up and out

And into your sister's eyes,

And into your brother's face,

Your country,

And say simply,

With hope –

Good morning.

Maya Angelou

Opening Song: #122 "Sound Over All Waters"

Introduction: "O'er the Ramparts"

John Greenleaf Whittier, you notice, wrote the words to that song. He was a Quaker, but his words have been chosen for six of our hymnal's songs. Whittier's spirit clearly speaks to ours - often, if not always.

One poem not rendered into our songs may be among his best known. It's the panegyric to Barbara Frietche, the stout Union spirit who defied Robert E. Lee's army as it marched victorious through her town after the Battle of Fredericksburg.

*On that pleasant morn of early fall
When Lee marched over the mountain wall;*

*Over the mountains winding down,
Horse and foot, into Frederick town.*

*Up rose old Barbara Frietchie then,
Bowed with her fourscore years and ten;*

*Bravest of all in Frederick town,
She took up the flag the men hauled down; --*

*She leaned far out on the window-sill,
And shook it forth with a royal will.*

*"Shoot, if you must, this old gray head,
But spare your country's flag," she said.*

The Civil War was one into which our forebears, actual and spiritual, could join with their soul. And the spirit that gave us "Barbara Frietchie" in 1873 was the same that moved Congress four years later to proclaim the first Flag Day, on the 100th anniversary of the continental congress's adoption of the "stars and stripes" as our national standard, June 14th.

Last year, in the book *Who Are We?*, Samuel Huntington, Harvard historian, wrote that this move to celebrate American identity in that time was motivated in part by the post-war challenge to acculturate the new waves of European immigrants who were landing on our shores. This need, and our nationalistic response, continued to build through the Spanish American War and into the First World War. Nebraska, in fact, played its role when our state's Supreme Court ruled that the United States flag was entitled to the same kind of protection accorded to religious symbols. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld their ruling in 1907. (Huntington 127).

Just last March, in the periodical *Foreign Policy*, Huntington published a summary of his book's central thrust under the title *José, Can You See*. The title sharpens his core concern, that our culture's response to this century's Hispanic immigration is very different from that of our 19th century forbears - that our response now in fact threatens to undermine our very identity as a nation.

Who Are We was my sole English companion in my time in Mexico this year, because I wanted to measure Huntington's concern against my experience both there and here. Francis Scott Key taught us to praise the "star-spangled banner" he watched 'o'er the ramparts,' during our first war to defend ourselves from invasion. I've seen the barbed wire topped wall which separates our nation from its southern neighbor. I've heard our Hispanic neighbors describe their nighttime climbs over that wall, desperately hoping for no 'rockets red glare.' I struggle to reconcile the values the flag stood for over Ft. McHenry's walls with those it stands for over Laredo's.

So today, on the eve of our nation's Flag Day celebration this year, I'd like to examine Professor Huntington's concern with you, in light of the values we celebrate within these walls. As you'll see, my response has come, in yet another way, to find its inspiration in the spirit of such of our ancestors as John Greenleaf Whittier.

Interlude: "Solace: A Mexican Serenade" – Scott Joplin

Milestones, Millstones, Stepping Stones

Music: "Lonesome for Night" – Máximo Galazo

Sermon: "José, Can You See?"

John Greenleaf Whittier you've heard of. Scott Joplin you've heard of. But Máximo Galazo? Who was he?

When "Lonesome for Night" was composed, in 1925, Massimo was a thirty-two year old pharmacist in Butte, Montana. Learning through apprenticeships, he'd passed his licensing exam in Washington state, and found his first job in Butte. His musical skills, as a composer, cellist and violinist, were similarly largely self-taught. A few years later, Massimo decided that if he could teach himself to pass the pharmacy exam, he could also teach himself to pass the bar exam. Most of his career was thus spent as a lawyer. Along the way, he acquired interests in several Butte businesses, including a restaurant he ended up managing for some years. At 57, he even ran for congress, defeated only by a young man on his own way up, U.S. Senate Majority Leader-to-be, Mike Mansfield. But Massimo didn't begin his life in Montana, or Washington. He came west on his own at the age of 15, from New York City, lower Brooklyn, where his parents ran a grocery store, and he worked as delivery boy for a pharmacy from the age of 12. His formal education never reached beyond the third grade because his parents brought him to the United States at the age of 8, from their birthplace and life as agricultural workers in the hamlet of Galassi on the slopes of Mount Vesuvius south of Naples, Italy. And how do I know all this? Because Massimo was Bill Carpenter's grandfather; I've even learned that that he actually spelled his name Massimo Galasso, with double ss's, from a higher authority - from his daughter, Betty Galasso Carpenter.

So let me ask, how many of us are direct descendents of those who immigrated to the United States of America? – meaning that they came here after the Constitution established our nation in 1788? And how many of us descend directly from those whose residency dates from the colonial times before 1788? And how many raised our hands both times, like me?

Last Sunday was a kind of border-crossing for me, a return to our pulpit following my sabbatical time apart. Yesterday was a similar crossing, my first Saturday back in service at the monthly free legal clinic for immigrants, Equity in Nebraska, sponsored by the United Methodist Ministries. We've become very conscious of our national borders, in our 'post 911' fear of alien attack, haven't we? While I'm volunteering here to provide aliens with a legal basis for staying here, near my former home in Arizona, others are volunteering as new 'minutemen' border guards to capture and send them back south. Now the eminent historian Samuel Huntington exerts his considerable intellect to ground and inspire their work.

Who Are We?'s first salvo seeks to correct the now clichéd claim that Franklin Roosevelt first made to the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1938, that we are all 'descended from immigrants.' A study based 1990 census data, it points out, revealed that only a bare majority of our country's current population, 51% of it, was attributable to post 1790 immigration. The remaining 49% of it descends from those who came in the 17th & 18th century. (45) Those earlier arrivals, Huntington argues, are more properly understood to be 'settlers' not as 'immigrants'. Both their self-understanding in that role, and the reception it inspired them to give to the real immigrants who followed them here, he says, are essential to who we are as a nation.

The First Parish of Plymouth Massachusetts, now member of the Unitarian Universalist Association, was founded, you remember, by protesting Christians who felt called to found a New Israel in this land they imaged as a New Eden. They and their puritan cousins in the Massachusetts Bay Colony did not come here to 'become Americans'; rather they came here on a God-commanded mission to provide a Christian model to their corrupted cousins back in Europe to reform their old societies in keeping with God's Christian commandments. On one of my passes through Lincoln in the course of my sabbatical travels, I saw several of you at the Lied auditorium for Professor John Gerard Ruggie's E.N. Thompson on "American Exceptionalism, Exemptionalism and Global Governance." As English historian Paul Johnson says of our nation's rootage, we are "a God-fearing country, with all it implies." Our religious commitment "is a primary source - *the* primary source, I think, -- of American exceptionalism." (cf.Huntington.86) Our founding spirit was to set ourselves apart, to be a city on a hill.

This exceptionalist mindset, Samuel Huntington says, is what has empowered our culture to set standards of individual and societal life which have served us well and, in fact, been taken as an inspirational model by much of the world. The core values that give us such positive power, he says, are not just those enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, what Gunnar Myrdal characterized as 'the American Creed' – equality, individual rights, democratic self-determination. Undergirding them are the Puritan beliefs in the fundamental opposition of good & evil.(69), the gospel of individual responsibility to demonstrate eternal election which inspires our famous

‘work ethic’, (72) and the understanding of politics as a matter of morality, a collective responsibility to make ‘Kingdom of God on Earth.’ (74)

Up until the 1960's, Huntington then argues, this core identity governed the spirit with which the ‘settlers’ among us greeted the later immigrants. We demanded that they become what we called ‘Americans,’ to abandon whatever contrary habits and skills they brought with them from the ‘old country’ to adopt the language, habit and values of Puritanism. Benjamin Schwartz makes the point most clearly: American identity, he says, is derived “from the ability and willingness of the Anglo elite to stamp its image on other peoples coming to country” (61) Alongside the inaccuracy of the ‘nation of immigrants cliché, Samuel Huntington says, we must also place the unhelpfulness of the hoary aspiration that our nation should strive to be a ‘melting pot’ of the world’s cultures. Israel Zangwill, another author whose inspiration our hymnal enshrines, created this image with his 1908 play entitled "the Melting Pot." It was endorsed by our Roosevelt president, Teddy. But, says Huntington, Roosevelt’s actions, and those of his 19th century forebears, actually bespoke a different culinary metaphor. Immigration, as they controlled it, was allowed to add "celery, croutons, spices, parsley, and other ingredients that enrich and diversify the taste, but (they) were absorbed into what remained fundamentally (a) tomato soup." (128-9)

In 1965 we opened the third major wave of immigration to our shores, this time not from Europe as were the first two, first from its west, Ireland, Germany, Italy, and then from its East, Poland, Russia and their southern neighbors. This new wave has come from all parts of the world, all directions, but most powerfully from our south. Since the 2000 census, our newspapers are full of notice of the rising percentage of Hispanic-origin residents in our country – last weeks Journal Star article trumpeted ‘Hispanics now make up one-seventh’ of U.S. population. And alongside the usual fears for wage depressing competition, has come the fear that this new wave now includes ‘swarthy’ terrorists to bomb our buildings or poison our food or water supply.

Samuel Huntington argues that our identity is threatened by this invasion as never before because we’ve lost of forebears’ willingness to force these new arrivals to adopt our settler culture. Our Supreme Court has declared alienage a “constitutionally suspect classification” as a basis for discrimination (214). Rather than affirm the tried and true ‘tomato soup’ image for immigrant assimilation, the idealistic ‘melting pot’ image is more often abandoned in favor of a kind of "salad" metaphor for cultural identity, which different cultural characteristics allowed to retain their independent identity side by side, supposedly drawn together by the light dressing of allegiance to ‘America’s Creed.’ Most obviously, Huntington sees our playing with acceptance of bilingualism as a serious threat to our culture. “Nations are groups of people who communicate more extensively and intensely with each other than they do with other people” (159) “American Dream” can only be dreamed in English (256). More fundamentally, he takes the sociological evidence of the strengthening of our allegiance to explicitly protestant Christian identities, as a hopeful movement to be encouraged to retain the secular values that identity fostered at our finding. “The American Creed is unlikely to retain its salience if Americans

abandon the Anglo-Protestant culture in which it has been rooted,' he concludes, 'A multicultural America will, in time, become a multi-creedal America.'" (340)

If you were here last Sunday, you know that an unexpected outgrowth of my sabbatical experience, study and reflection has been an heightened sense that the gathering power of the European Union may be growing a source of alternative inspiration for our 'nation-building.' To be sure the recent Dutch and French rejections of the proposed European constitution demonstrate that integration there will not go forward in a straight line. The momentum and depth of that integration over the past 15 years, however, will not be easily reversed or long stalled, I believe.

Perhaps you saw the *Lincoln Journal Star* reprint of a Bok cartoon recently. It shows two overweight men facing one another, one seated on a scooter wearing a polo shirt labeled U.S.A., the other seated at a café table wearing a pullover labeled Europe. U.S.A. asks Europe "Is your seething Muslim population supporting you in the style to which you're accustomed?" Europe responds, "Not bad. Is your tide of illegal Mexican immigrants keeping you afloat?"

Europe provides us no inspiration on the healthy integration of immigrants, so far, I know. They recognize this. In fact, T.R. Reid reports in his book *The United States of Europe*, they often envy what they, I think mistakenly view as our continued openness. What they don't envy is us, is our passion for patriotism (14-18, 24). World War II largely cured Europeans of patriotism largely cured them of that. (35-36)] I believe that the European motto 'unity in diversity' in 25 languages, is the promising model for our future, along with their evolution beyond the self understanding as a Christian culture, to one rooted in enlightenment humanism.

Here's, what for me has become the antidote to Samuel Huntington's cry to raise our cultural walls and preserve our pure identity. Randall Robinson, Harvard educated, black internationalist, last year published his explanation of the decision to move to his wife's place of birth, the Caribbean Island of St. Catherine, or St. Kitts. Its title is Quitting America. In it he says,

"I think that when Americans say that America is the greatest country in the world, they mean only that it is the richest and most powerful – that Americans have more stuff than anyone else, and that they can just flat shoot everybody else's lights out. – I don't think they can mean that Americans are the happiest people in the world, or the most well-adjusted people, or the most moral (8) One sure measure of a society's relative health is its suicide rate. – The United States' – rate for males (is) 18.6 (per 100,000 people) – for females 4.4. St. Kitts has a suicide rate for both males and females of zero. The same is true for – Antigua and Barbuda and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Perhaps there is indeed something special about what Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, the prime minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, calls "Our Caribbean Civilization." To put a converse point on the point: Does Donald Rumsfeld look happy to you? Squint if you have doubts?" (26)

In fact, one of my classmates at Academia Falcon echoed Robinson in explaining to me why she hoped to find at least part-year work in Mexico. As compared to her neighbors in Minneapolis

and family in Wisconsin, she said, the Mexicans she taught there and those she was meeting in Mexico just seemed like happier people. Later, when I saw it in our Journal Star, I told her of the report of the Stockholm Sweden based World Values Survey which interviewed 120,000 people from 82 societies to determine among other things, who among us was the happiest. United States Americans ranked 15th. Mexicans, as it turns out, ranked second. But first? - that is the Puerto Ricans. We would do well, I think, to at least consider their potential as a model for our best future.

I am concerned that the United States retain something of its Protestant identity. Its protection of individual rights, yes, in pursuit of an ideal world, and the individual self-examination that such pursuit requires. I would also like to see us retain to motivation to self-improvement and self-realization that undergirds our famous work-ethic, though I would like to see some of its self, and socially, destructive dimensions reformed. What I am not eager to see is the doctrine of 'American exceptionalism' carried into our future, with its tendency to justify our hubris in exempting ourselves from fitting into larger global community-building. I bridle at the assumption that in order to do that we have to protect its Christian identity. I see evidence that the loss of that identity in Europe as the basis for greater respect and support for human diversity and health, even if it is not yet expressed in their immigration policy. I understand the difficulty of maintaining a nation with multiple forms of communication, but I think this is inevitable.

Indeed Samuel Huntington himself is hardly an optimistic proponent of his own solution "All societies eventually succumb to threats to their existence." He even acknowledges the possible wisdom of Robert Kaplan's judgment that "America, more than any other nation, may have been born to die." (12) Still Huntington doggedly urges that "America can postpone its demise by recommitting itself to its Anglo-Protestant culture, traditions and values. (xvii) Why fight off an inevitable future. This is a change that is coming. We can't fight it off. Why not embrace it, infuse our best into it, but embrace our evolution as well?

Our continental borders, as a nation, of course were established before the civil war, mostly in the war fought with Mexico to complete the transfer of Texas into our corpus. John Greenleaf Whittier had a far different spirit regarding another of our country's wars. In 1845, when General Winfield Scott bombarded the city of Veracruz in the Mexican American War, Whittier denounced the indiscriminate slaughter as equal to the massacres of the French Revolution. (David J. Weber. San Diego Historical Society. www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/72winter/br-surfbboats.htm). Joining him in that war's flag waving were several of our more direct ancestors. Henry David Thoreau spent his famous night in the Concord jail for refusing to pay the tax which supported that war. James Russell Lowell was moved by his horror at that war to write the words to the song some of you petitioned me to sing on the Sunday before last fall's election. Do you remember it? # 119 "Once to every soul and nation comes to moment to decide, in the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side."

Randall Robinson, in tracing his own brainwashing, writes that in his schooling, "They had me root for Jim Bowie and Davie Crockett at the Alamo. I should have rooted for Santa Anna. ---

After all, he was defending his country, -- Texas was a part of Mexico. Mexico prohibited slavery in all its provinces. --- The American "heroes" of the Alamo wanted to wrench Texas from Mexico, in part to insinuate slavery in Texas a day later. This wasn't covered in the John Wayne movie." (50)

My contact with immigrant clients leads me to believe that we are now veering back to that troublesome time. People are lured here to employment at rates and under conditions citizens need not accept, and without many of the civil protection citizenship provides. Our nation's businesses will not stop the employment. We cannot stop the immigration. I believe our only true allegiance to our rootage will be to grant equality under our laws to all men, people, human beings.

*Over Barbara Frietchie's grave,
Flag of Freedom and Union, wave!*

John Greenleaf concluded his poem,

*Peace and order and beauty draw
Round thy symbol of light and law;*

I like Whittier's optimism – like the words in his song: "Reach out from all lands – the clasping of hands – the heavens resound -- a new day is crowned"

In Spanish, we are not "Americans", we are *estadounidenses*, United States-ers. If we are to truly become "Americans", our country's creed, the so-called "American Creed," must also become nuestro credo Americano, I believe. *Pero delante nosotros, hay trabajo que hacer* – But before us there is work to do.

Closing Song: #126 "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing"

Chalice Extinguishing

*We hold these truths to be self-evident,
That all – are created equal,
That they are endowed by their creator
With certain unalienable rights,
That among them are
life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.*

Thomas Jefferson