



The Ethical Humanist

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BOOK REVIEW

Civil War Reflections

Peter Denison

AFTER LINCOLN: How the North Won the Civil War and Lost the Peace, by **A. J. Langguth**

Langguth gives a lively account of the Reconstruction period, primarily 1865-1877. Most of the chapters are built around a primary character. Indeed he even includes a list of the primary characters. His list includes several Southerners such as General Lee and Jefferson Davis, and also some Southern Republicans who allied with the former slaves to seize control of most of the Southern states. Some of the Negroes proved to be quite capable both as political strategists and as administrators. Some were elected to Congress, but never in proportion to their numbers. Langguth clearly presents the opposition from White southerners and shows how they gradually destroyed the Reconstruction envisioned

by President Lincoln. Why did the Southerners succeed? Reconstruction was chaotic, at least in part because the North did not really know what it wanted. Southern Whites were firmly opposed to civil rights and equality for the African Americans to whom they continually referred using a vulgar racial epithet. They hated the Northerners who came down to handle the details of emancipation and see to it that African Americans were not oppressed. After the death of Lincoln, President Andrew Johnson showed little sympathy for Negroes and all too often sided with the White Southerners even when they used extreme violence against Negroes. He did betray Lincoln's legacy and southern Negroes would have fared somewhat better if Johnson had not only been impeached but also removed from office. (Yes, I disagree with John F. Kennedy's views in Profiles in Courage.)

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Presidential Politics: Winners and Losers

Andrea Perrault

The race for the presidency of the United States certainly has been eventful so far, with occurrences I'm sure none of us had anticipated. Some are good – racial and gender diversity among the candidates for one – but most, although unexpected, are worrisome.

The sustained momentum of Donald Trump as a potential nominee of the Republican Party is likely the most surprising for Massachusetts' liberals. His success signifies that traditional political leaders and their handlers in both parties had misjudged the distrust and disaffection of the voting public. Prior years' seeming over-reliance on big money, advertising, and what amounted to voter harassment had drained the electorate of energy and a taste for the blood sport of American politics.

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The Way It Is (?)

Marvin Miller

Socialism

Martin Luther King Jr., whose birthday we celebrate in January, said he was a socialist. So does Sen. Bernie Sanders, whose presidential candidacy has resurrected "socialism" from the deep oblivion in which it has rested for a long time in the U.S. (Elsewhere, people calling themselves socialists or social democrats hold major public offices, but they rarely put forward proposals to move important productive activities from private to public ownership. Indeed, as in Greece, they are often unable to resist transitions in the opposite direction.)

Socialism is the provision of goods or services by an agency of government, rather than by a privately owned enterprise, profit-seeking or nonprofit. The U.S. has plenty of socialism, and we Americans love it. It's the word "socialism" that bothers us, a result of a lifetime of conditioning from government, media, and other elements of our cultural environment.

The earliest instance of socialism in an English-speaking part of what is now the U.S. was the common house in Plymouth, built by the Pilgrims in the early 1620s. Another early example is the Boston Common, set aside from private ownership in 1634. The Constitution authorizes Congress to establish post offices to facilitate mail delivery, a

socialist activity. The military and naval establishments, also authorized by the Constitution, are government activities.

The coins and bills in our pockets and purses are goods provided by government — the mint and the Bureau of Engraving. The bills are Federal Reserve Notes. The water we use in metropolitan areas comes from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority and similar agencies around the country. The food grown with irrigation, like Nebraska corn and California fruits and vegetables, depends on government water projects. It comes to us over government-provided roads and streets and government-maintained waterways. Large cities could not exist without public transportation systems. Air travel is, as it must be, controlled by government. Many local electric power systems are owned by the people they serve and run by local government agencies.

Our local, state, and national parks, playgrounds, beaches, and other recreational areas are socialist services that we enjoy. The Weather Bureau, now part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, helps us plan our days and warns us of hurricanes and tornadoes. It depends on information from satellites launched by NASA. So do our GPS devices, cable and satellite TV, and radio

transmission. The Internet was invented by DARPA, a government agency.

Most Americans get our elementary and secondary education from public schools, and major higher education and research are carried on at public universities and colleges. Much private research is financed by government agencies. Our public libraries are beloved institutions.

After the financial catastrophe of the great depression, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation was established to provide security for bank deposits. Social Security was established in 1935. Medicare and Medicaid came thirty years later.

Though Sen. Sanders calls himself a socialist, he didn't propose socializing the big banks that almost destroyed the world's economy through their risky speculation. Eugene Debs, five-time Socialist Party candidate for president a century ago, might have deemed Sanders a Theodore Roosevelt Republican.

Modestly increasing the amount of socialism in the US, as, for example, by expanding Medicare to cover everyone, would be beneficial and popular, but it wouldn't fundamentally change the economic or political structure of the country. We don't need to be afraid of it, nor should we have excessive hopes for it.

Peter Denison, *continued*
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Thousands of Negroes were killed as Federal troops often turned a blind eye. President Grant did try to enforce Negro rights, but troops on the ground did not always do his bidding. Once the Democrats gained a majority in Congress they were able to cut the appropriations for the armed forces, thus making enforcement even more difficult.

White southerners wanted to put the Negro in his place and bring back White supremacy. They called themselves "Redeemers" and used many tools of violence including the Ku Klux Klan. The Radical Republicans did push through the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. Republican hatred of President Johnson probably helped to get wavering Republicans to support these measures. Even Northerners who had sympathized with the condition of Negro slaves began to lose interest. There was more political interest in opening up the western parts of our country. Railroads were built both in the west and in the former Confederate states. Southerners did want railroads and factories, but definitely not Negro equality

But when Langguth speaks of the North losing the peace, is he really accurate? I would say no. In the pre-war period the abolitionists were generally a minority even in northern states. Even the

abolitionists did not believe in racial equality. John Brown, who was hanged for leading a raid attempting to free slaves by force, did both believe in and practice equality. He and his whole family joined and participated in a Negro church. Most northerners were as racist as their southern brothers. Leaders like Lincoln were worried about what the Supreme Court would do. Chief Justice Taney in 1857 in the Dred Scott decision stated that a slave who had spent a long period in a free state was still a slave. Black men had "no rights that a white man must respect." The logic of that decision could, as Lincoln feared, lead to another decision that a slave owner could bring his slaves to any free state and still keep them as slaves, essentially making slavery legal in all the states, north and south. Almost all Northerners were opposed to such an outcome. They did not want Negro slaves to compete with White men for jobs or for land in the western plains. Their anti-slavery convictions were never based on sympathy for Negroes.

Woodrow Wilson has long been regarded as one of our great presidents. The only criticism involved his handling of the failed League of Nations treaty. Only recently has he been perceived as a racist. And a racist he certainly was. When he became President, segregation in Washington had been ended; he reinstated it. In 1915 the movie *Birth of a Nation* was

regarded as a great movie. It represented the Negro as being completely incompetent and the KKK's activities as being completely justified and necessary in order to save law and order in the South. Wilson liked the movie and so did most American people.

No, the American people got what they wanted. The abolitionists did not get all they wanted, but even most of them were not enthusiastic about racial equality. Only after World War II ended did Americans begin to think seriously of and desire real equality. Even now a large segment of Americans are either opposed to equality, or at least lacking much fervor for the subject.

New Year's Day

New Year's Day —
everything is in blossom!
I feel about average.

Kobayashi Issa



**Andrea Perrault, continued
from page 1**

More voters seemed to wish we had election cycles as short as those of other countries like the United Kingdom and Canada. The public needed a respite from the campaign overkill of the recent past, and political operatives did not understand the depth of voter discouragement and discontent. Though they may be obsessed with polls and punditry, the larger population no longer is. We were tired. Hence, the rise of what seemed like political entertainment over the summer months.

The Republican debates were spectacles that amazed many: — so many candidates that a “big kids”, and a “little kids” table, emerged. At neither table were issues or public policy of significance addressed with seriousness. Candidates with no political or public sector experience or heft — Trump, Carson, and

Fiorina — emerged to dominate the airwaves and these debates. Democrats, intellectuals, and many others were aghast at the name-calling, race-baiting, and ego-boosting diatribes that dominated these events. In fact, they seemed to provide an odd kind of entertainment instead. If we were tired of politics, maybe we’d at least be amused by circus-like sideshows. The candidates blamed the media, and the media became defensive. No winners here!

Democrats fared better in the debates, discussing solid policy issues, both domestic and international. At least, one could count the candidates on one hand and recognize that they did have the knowledge to engage in serious dialogue about public policy. These candidates had much experience to rely and reflect on. Bernie Sanders mobilized young voters and established himself as a viable contender for the nomination.

Hillary Clinton established herself as a very strong debater, giving in to no one on the Democratic or Republican side. Martin O’Malley is still in the fray, although he likely will not command a following strong enough to continue in the quest. Joe Biden excused himself which, given the circumstance of his son’s untimely death, seemed reasonable.

The country and the voters seem not to be “winners” so far, with rhetoric that only seems to divide us being predominant in the public discourse. It does seem that the political handlers and pundits are clear “losers” — the public does not want politics as usual. However, we may not get politics as usual, but what we end up getting could be far worse — landing us all in the “loser” category. Become engaged, help to educate the electorate in your community, contribute to and vote for serious candidates, and hope we all will win.

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Sunday Programs in January 2016

January 3

No program.

January 10

Michael Bleiweiss, Vice President, Boston Ethical Community



Colloquy

Colloquy provides an opportunity for self-reflection and contemplation within a nurturing, group environment. Participants use

readings, music, and quiet sharing to reflect on a selected theme.

Colloquy was created at the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island by Arthur Dobrin, Leader Emeritus. Each Colloquy discussion centers on a particular theme selected from Arthur Dobrin's book, *Spelling God with Two O's*. Groups consider such topics as awareness, serenity, character, transitions and friendship.

January 17

Brian King, President, Boston Ethical Community

A New Focus for the Ethical Community



Half-way through this experimental year, we would like to present to our members and visitors a summary of our December board retreat and workshop with AEU Executive Director Bart Worden, with a look to the changes ahead.

January 24

David Rothauer, Memory Productions

Hibakusha, Our Life to Live



Filmmaker David Rothauer tells the stories of Japanese, Korean and American survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The stories are told by the survivors themselves and interwoven with the

reflections of two children; Yoko an 8 year old Japanese girl and Davey, a 12 year old American boy.

January 31

Marilynn S. Johnson, Professor of History, Boston College

The New Bostonians: How Immigrants Have Transformed the Metro Region Since the 1960s



Professor of History Marilynn S. Johnson examines the historical confluence of recent immigration and urban transformation in greater Boston, a region that underwent dramatic decline after World War II. Since the 1980s, the Boston area has experienced an

astounding renaissance—a development, she argues, to which immigrants have contributed in numerous ways. Like the older Irish and other European immigrant groups whose labor once powered the region's industrial economy, these newer migrants have been crucial in rebuilding the population, labor force, and metropolitan landscape of the New Boston.

~ Program Schedule for January 2016 ~	
January 10	Michael Bleiweiss , Vice President, Boston Ethical Community, <i>Colloquy</i>
January 17	Brian King , President, Boston Ethical Community <i>A New Focus for the Ethical Community</i>
January 24	David Rothauser , Filmmaker, Memory Productions <i>Hibakusha, Our Life to Live</i>
January 31	Marilynn S. Johnson , Professor of History, Boston College <i>The New Bostonians: How Immigrants Have Transformed Boston</i>
Sunday Meetings are held at 10:30 AM at 33 Garden St in Cambridge	

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