

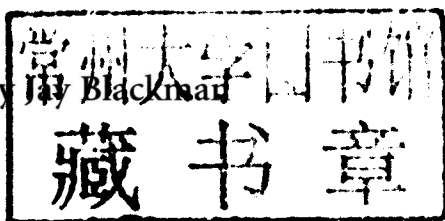


Foreign Fanaticism and American Constitutional Values

RODNEY JAY BLACKMAN

FOREIGN FANATICISM AND AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL VALUES

Rodney



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**FOREIGN FANATICISM AND
AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL
VALUES**

I

PROLOGUE

My father, a Latvian Jew, probably came to this country at the age of two in 1903. According to my mother, her mother-in-law spoke Yiddish but did not speak English very well. But whether or not my father knew any Yiddish or Latvian (and I assume he must have learned some as a child), when I got to know him he claimed to know no foreign languages. I was in no position to believe otherwise for his English was unaccented.

My father graduated from the University of Chicago Law School and became a successful antitrust lawyer in Chicago. He voted Republican. He voted for every Republican presidential candidate from 1940 until he died in 1970. He also felt a strong sense of gratitude toward this country, a feeling that I share and hope that this book demonstrates.

Despite my father's love for this country and a strong sense of patriotism, there was what I might call a subliminal fear. The fear was reflected in his claim that my roots in this country went back a fairly long time, some fifty or sixty years. For him, this gave me a pedigree, admittedly not as long as many, but still better than his as a naturalized citizen.

As we now know, it was a fear that other parents shared and led them to keep their Jewish ancestry secret from their children. The list includes the father of General Wesley Clark, the mother of Senator George Allen of Virginia, the father of Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts and the parents of Madeline Albright, the former Secretary of State.

In my father's case the fear did not lead to total silence about his heritage. Rather, despite his relative indifference to Judaism, he decided to send me to a liberal (Classical Reform) Jewish Sunday School to get a dollop of education in religion and ethnic pride in order to create, if possible, a positive image of my heritage that could counter any increased level of anti-Semitism. If a virulent outbreak of what happened in Nazi Germany were to happen here, I would need this image to fend off the self hatred that probably would otherwise accompany it.

The fear was also reflected in his reluctance to tell strangers that he was Jewish. As he put it to one friend of mine, he didn't go to church very often. Well

yes, but he didn't go to synagogue very often either. He was an assimilated non-religious Jew, and uncomfortable about his Jewishness.

Why this fear? As far as I can tell, the fear was of not quite belonging, perhaps even of being deported. It was not very rational, but it was not altogether irrational either. It was not altogether irrational because the Nazis had wiped out almost all of the Jews from that part of Continental Europe in which he was born. It was not altogether irrational because Stalin, conquering that part of Europe in which he was born, also killed his perceived enemies by the millions, better off people, intellectuals and Jews. And although I don't write about it in this book, it was not altogether irrational because, even in the America of the 1950s in which I was raised, Jews were excluded from certain suburbs, golf courses, and social clubs and had more difficulty than most in getting into certain universities because of their quota system. Also, one could never be sure where the McCarthy witch hunts would end up.

Nor does it seem irrational in light of the revelations about two of our 20th Century great liberal presidents, Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman. Roosevelt told his Catholic and Jewish associates that they were living in a Protestant country and were here on sufferance.¹ And Truman, apparently responding to his wife's wishes, even after he left the White House, refused to allow Jewish visitors to go inside the family home in Independence, Missouri.² What Roosevelt and Truman were indicating was what my father feared subliminally, namely, that his place in this land was not altogether secure, that he couldn't be sure that the people who mattered, whoever they were, would think that he belonged. It was an immigrant's fear, an outsider's fear and one that was and is shared by many others of various backgrounds.

This book reflects not only my good fortune in having been born in this country and gratitude toward the American framers for having created a system of constitutional government that has kept foreign fanaticism at bay and out of my life, but also my comfort level in this land that enables me to write about it. Several foreign fanatics whom I chronicle, while also attacking others, expressed visceral hatred of and murderous violence toward Jews.

I write about foreign political and religious extremism leading to the killing of millions because, if I had been there instead of here, I too would have been killed. So, in writing a history of prominent examples of political and religious irrational hatred, I am indicating why I am concerned about this subject. In writing what I am concerned about, I too am demonstrating a distant echo of my father's subliminal fear. Only the fear has been domesticated. I have the satisfaction of knowing that the foreign demon is contained through a domestic bottle created by our founding fathers.

Still, my concerns haven't necessarily been those of the average reader. Until recently, many readers might have felt the theme of the irrational foreign political and religious utopian experiments that led to the killing of millions to be a story particularly distant from their own lives. Until recently it has been easy for most Americans to feel very comfortable in this land of tranquility and prosperity.

Extremist Islamic attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 and subsequent attacks in Madrid, London and Iraq have substantially changed the dynamics of American, and not just Jewish, interest in attempting to understand the irrational forces that produced these events. Suddenly, it pays for all of us to become familiar with foreign irrationality. All Americans have come to share that slight sense of dread, paranoia and fear unconnected to any specific unfolding actions that used to be the province of only a relative few. It is not surprising that we collectively ask, could it happen again on our soil. In a sense, we are now all Jews.

We may feel a slight sense of dread of what could happen when we go to the airport to board a plane and we take off our shoes and have our bodies searched. We are reminded that we have reason for concern when we go into a government building, say, to get a tax form, and have to empty our pockets of loose change to get through the scanning device. The fear level rises again if we work in or visit a tall building in a major city. Then again the anxiety increases if we visit a country where people have experienced religious violence in the recent past.

But the fear is spread about; almost an equal opportunity source of anxiety. It is not just American Jews and Christians who might experience it. If one is a Muslim or looks Arabic or Southeast Asian minding one's own affairs in many American towns and cities, others might accost you with suspicion and hostility. Thus, there is reason for all of us to become cognizant of my chronicle of some of the major political and religious fanatical movements, and their consequences.

II

INTRODUCTION

A. The Thesis

I think of this book as a series of separate chapters that mirror various monster films. The most vivid monster film is the story of radical Islam that intruded into American consciousness in the September 11, 2001 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City. But there are other monster stories that fit the genre that I recount as well. These stories detail foreign horrors that we fortunately have avoided.

By the end of a monster movie, things are usually back to normal. And even if not, we walk outside the theatre and realize that things are as they were before we entered. My book has a chapter that mirrors this part of the movie scenario as well. Only it comes toward the beginning of the book rather than at the end. It informs us that the framers' vision and the resulting constitutional structure they created is the reason why we have avoided so many of the monster scenarios that have intruded on others.

What radical foreign Muslims did here on September 11th and later in Madrid and London forces us to focus on the nightmare, reminding us that fanatics could still destroy what we have created. The specter of Islamic terror intruding into our lives prevents us from totally escaping into the sunny world that existed before. Otherwise, we could relax and feel very comfortable in this land of tranquility and prosperity as we used to. But the nightmare possibility does intrude.

It is true that Americans aren't only concerned about fanaticism and terror. Many have to deal with other significant problems, such as, poverty, racism, health care inequities, gender bias and indifference to gender differences, homophobia, environmental degradations and the ordinary difficulties associated with living. Because my focus is on fanaticism, however, I will not be writing about any of these issues.

The stories I recount don't direct your attention to specific current acts of Islamic terror which are already part of public consciousness. Rather, I write about the theological justifications and history of Islamic fanaticism. Is our

justified fear of Muslim extremists a result of their having hijacked their religion? If not, as I suggest, the problem becomes even more serious.

But the book is not limited to Islamic terror. While Islamic terror is the current concern, it is unfair to Muslims to imply that only members of that community have killed in the name of God. Among Westerners, Jews and particularly Christians have also committed atrocities. So, I deal with the theological roots and history of Christian and Jewish fanaticism as well. Because the past history of Christian anti-Semitism in particular has created a number of monster stories for Jews, its history retains its significance as a possible precursor to the future.

But the story of fanaticism is not limited to the religious variety. When we focus only on the Islamic terror of the present moment, we tend to forget that some of the most rabid and lethal monsters have been anti-religious political leaders who have used their power to limit or eliminate religious life in their countries. When we broaden our focus to include the stories of the most powerful of these political fanatics, we become conscious that they have killed thousands of times more people than the September 11th Islamic terrorists. So, in writing about fanaticism, I focus on these utopian political leaders as well, recounting the history of destruction carried out by several of the most influential and blood thirsty of them.

Because of his influence on Hitler and Soviet leaders, I write about Robespierre even though he did not kill as many people. And then I turn to the later leaders, the 20th Century's rogues' gallery of fanatics, recounting the history of Hitler's Nazi regime and the apogee of communist terror in the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin, and in China under Mao. Each of these monster rates a separate chapter.

Telling the stories of what fanatics have done fortifies our desire to fight any effort to embark on their path. And any success I have will remind you that people who brook no opposition to imposing their utopian dreams are our common enemy. But ultimately, my concern is personal, for when a nightmare movie becomes reality, I and others like me would no longer be able to walk outside into the sunshine. In short, people's possible ignorance is not my bliss.

But who are the others like me? I think it would include you. As a thoughtful reader, you know that if someone could transform what otherwise would be like a monster movie into your reality, it would be your nightmare and not your bliss. People who think too much do not fare well when fanatics dominate a state or society. Pol Pot, the dictator of Cambodia, for example, used to execute people who wore glasses or had red lines around their eyes (telltale signs of having worn glasses) because they were presumed to be intellectuals

and therefore his opponents.¹ Although I don't tell the story of Pol Pot, the killing of intellectuals was part of the story of each of the political leaders whom I do discuss.

So, given that I am writing about fanatics, how do I determine who deserves this label? The question is not as easy to answer as at first it seems. Each of the political fanatics I discuss pursued a utopian vision and ignored empirical evidence that falsified his vision. It was of little or no concern to Communist and egalitarian dictators that people would be less willing to work hard and produce goods when they removed the profit motive. For Hitler, Jews were still parasites regardless of any apparent contributions to civilization they might make.

But this defining characteristic doesn't work for religious leaders. There is no empirical evidence that could falsify the idea that Jews are chosen by God, or that only Christians get to heaven or that non-Muslims are infidels.

Another approach, one that I adopt, unites political and religious fanatics under the rubric of their willingness to kill people because of who they are rather than what they've done; that is, killing based on status rather than acts. I think that Mohammed comes within this characterization along with the political leaders whom I have mentioned. It also would include those Muslims, Christians and Jews that took up the sword against perceived enemies who had done nothing to deserve it except fail to adhere to the right creed or group.

But suppose people who justifiably fear that they will be killed by religious zealots take up the sword in their own defense on the theory that a good offense is the best defense? I would regard such people as trying to avoid being potential victims rather than fanatics.

What then about the religious leader who calls for other people to be killed based on status but doesn't do the killing himself? I would expand my defining characteristic to include him. What about the religious leader who predicts that people will die or "describes" their future suffering in hell in the next world? This would be more of a borderline case. Each reader will have to decide for herself. I am inclined to regard such a person under an expansive definition of fanatic because it increases the contempt that followers would have for the object of scorn and therefore the likelihood that he would be persecuted or killed.

In addition to describing foreign political and religious fanaticism, I ask and try to answer the question, why has America been blessed in largely avoiding both political and religious fanaticism. So, in answering this question, I write about the success of the American experiment as well as about the foreign fanatics and terrorists.

While suggesting several reasons why the American republic has survived so long² as compared to other, later, more radical governmental experiments that either fell by the wayside or seem to teeter on the brink of doing so, I will focus on one explanation in particular. My explanation for American success centers on comparing our founding fathers' beliefs about human nature and what they did about it to the enumerated radical political revolutionary leaders and the actions they took to put their beliefs into effect. What the framers did to prevent the dominance of radical political leadership, they also attempted to do to prevent popular religious passions from wrecking havoc on minorities and dividing the country along religious lines.

Given the enduring threat to their democratic dreams from immutable aspects of human nature, the framers rested their hopes on a constitutional structure that, if followed, would counter these aspects. They created a structure that both reduced the risk that power hungry people in control of the government could destroy our democracy, or that the religious intoxication of the many could overwhelm the few and democracy itself.

September 11th showed that it does not take the many; the religious passions of the few can also substantially damage our country. But the structure the framers created, if followed, could also reduce the risk to the many from the passions of the few, at least if the few have grown up in our culture. I suggest, however, that the Supreme Court, in its effort to accommodate the religious needs of the many, has unwittingly added to the risk from the few. I discuss this dimension of religious radicalism and America's constitutionally based response to it in the book's last substantive chapter.

B. The Thesis Explored

Unlike their radical counterparts, the American framers, themselves men of the aristocracy, had a restricted agenda; namely, throw out the British. They were not attempting to get rid of the existing elite in favor of some new group except in so far as part of this elite was allied with the British government.³ The Framers' revolutionary goals, therefore, were limited. They had no agenda to transform either human nature or society generally.

So, before focusing on a comparison of the American Framers' beliefs about human nature and society and actions furthering these beliefs with foreign fanatics' beliefs, it's appropriate to briefly set forth other reasons for our American success. Our founding fathers, such as, Madison, Jefferson, John Adams, Hamilton, the aging Franklin, and Washington, were some of the best edu-