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AMERICAN V·A·L·U·E·S

OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS®

David L. Bender & Bruno Leone, *Series Editors*

David L. Bender, *Editor*



OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS SERIES®



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"Congress shall make no law . . .
abridging the freedom of speech,
or of the press."

First Amendment to the US Constitution

The basic foundation of our democracy is the first amendment guarantee of freedom of expression. The *Opposing Viewpoints Series* is dedicated to the concept of this basic freedom and the idea that it is more important to practice it than to enshrine it.

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Why Consider Opposing Viewpoints?

"It is better to debate a question without settling it than to settle a question without debating it."

Joseph Joubert (1754-1824)

The Importance of Examining Opposing Viewpoints

The purpose of the Opposing Viewpoints Series, and this book in particular, is to present balanced, and often difficult to find, opposing points of view on complex and sensitive issues.

Probably the best way to become informed is to analyze the positions of those who are regarded as experts and well studied on issues. It is important to consider every variety of opinion in an attempt to determine the truth. Opinions from the mainstream of society should be examined. But also important are opinions that are considered radical, reactionary, or minority as well as those stigmatized by some other uncomplimentary label. An important lesson of history is the eventual acceptance of many unpopular and even despised opinions. The ideas of Socrates, Jesus, and Galileo are good examples of this.

Readers will approach this book with their own opinions on the issues debated within it. However, to have a good grasp of one's own viewpoint, it is necessary to understand the arguments of those with whom one disagrees. It can be said that those who do not completely understand their adversary's point of view do not fully understand their own.

A persuasive case for considering opposing viewpoints has been presented by John Stuart Mill in his work *On Liberty*. When examining controversial issues it may be helpful to reflect on this suggestion:

The only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject, is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind. No wise man ever acquired his wisdom in any mode but this.

Analyzing Sources of Information

The Opposing Viewpoints Series includes diverse materials taken from magazines, journals, books, and newspapers, as well as statements and position papers from a wide range of individuals, organizations and governments. This broad spectrum of sources helps to develop patterns of thinking which are open to the consideration of a variety of opinions.

Pitfalls To Avoid

A pitfall to avoid in considering opposing points of view is that of regarding one's own opinion as being common sense and the most rational stance and the point of view of others as being only opinion and naturally wrong. It may be that another's opinion is correct and one's own is in error.

Another pitfall to avoid is that of closing one's mind to the opinions of those with whom one disagrees. The best way to approach a dialogue is to make one's primary purpose that of understanding the mind and arguments of the other person and not that of enlightening him or her with one's own solutions. More can be learned by listening than speaking.

It is my hope that after reading this book the reader will have a deeper understanding of the issues debated and will appreciate the complexity of even seemingly simple issues on which good and honest people disagree. This awareness is particularly important in a democratic society such as ours where people enter into public debate to determine the common good. Those with whom one disagrees should not necessarily be regarded as enemies, but perhaps simply as people who suggest different paths to a common goal.

Developing Basic Reading and Thinking Skills

In this book, carefully edited opposing viewpoints are purposely placed back to back to create a running debate; each viewpoint is preceded by a short quotation that best expresses the author's main argument. This format instantly plunges the reader into the midst of a controversial issue and greatly aids that reader in mastering the basic skill of recognizing an author's point of view.

A number of basic skills for critical thinking are practiced in the activities that appear throughout the books in the series. Some of

the skills are:

Evaluating Sources of Information The ability to choose from among alternative sources the most reliable and accurate source in relation to a given subject.

Separating Fact from Opinion The ability to make the basic distinction between factual statements (those that can be demonstrated or verified empirically) and statements of opinion (those that are beliefs or attitudes that cannot be proved).

Identifying Stereotypes The ability to identify oversimplified, exaggerated descriptions (favorable or unfavorable) about people and insulting statements about racial, religious or national groups, based upon misinformation or lack of information.

Recognizing Ethnocentrism The ability to recognize attitudes or opinions that express the view that one's own race, culture, or group is inherently superior, or those attitudes that judge another culture or group in terms of one's own.

It is important to consider opposing viewpoints and equally important to be able to critically analyze those viewpoints. The activities in this book are designed to help the reader master these thinking skills. Statements are taken from the book's viewpoints and the reader is asked to analyze them. This technique aids the reader in developing skills that not only can be applied to the viewpoints in this book, but also to situations where opinionated spokespersons comment on controversial issues. Although the activities are helpful to the solitary reader, they are most useful when the reader can benefit from the interaction of group discussion.

Using this book and others in the series should help readers develop basic reading and thinking skills. These skills should improve the reader's ability to understand what they read. Readers should be better able to separate fact from opinion, substance from rhetoric and become better consumers of information in our media-centered culture.

This volume of the Opposing Viewpoints Series does not advocate a particular point of view. Quite the contrary! The very nature of the book leaves it to the reader to formulate the opinions he or she finds most suitable. My purpose as publisher is to see that this is made possible by offering a wide range of viewpoints which are fairly presented.

David L. Bender
Publisher

Introduction

"Every effort to confine Americanism to a single pattern, to constrain it to a single formula, is disloyalty to everything that is valid in Americanism."

Henry Steele Commager, *Freedom, Loyalty, Dissent*

Among the larger nations of the world, there are two factors which distinguish America. The first is its relative youth. Americans trace their heritage as a sovereign nation not to the landing of the first English settlers in 1607 but to George Washington's inauguration as president in 1789, only 200 years ago. The second factor is the unique complexion of its inhabitants. Indeed, the pageant of American peoples boasts an ethnic, racial, and religious mixture virtually unmatched by any contemporary nation.

These two factors combine to create an American value system that is both uniform and mosaic. Democracy, the belief that power should arise from those over whom it is exercised, has provided and continues to provide the uniform footings from which America's social and political institutions have grown. At the same time, America's immigrants have brought to its shores more than the wish to participate in the democratic dream. By bequeathing such a diversity of cultural ideas and objects, they have forged America's singular "melting pot" experience.

By chance and design, America thus has become a land of contrasting values—a place where, as historian Henry Steele Commager implies, conformity and disloyalty are synonymous. And while this phenomenon is not exclusively American, few other peoples have elevated the "agreement to disagree" nearly to a religious article of faith.

This anthology of opposing viewpoints attempts to portray the diverse nature of Americanism as reflected in its value system. The viewpoints purposely focus upon issues which have been argued as far back as the fledgling days of the nation when its survival was often little more than a wistful hope. It is remarkable and telling that they are still being debated today with similar constancy and urgency. Debated are, What Are America's Political Values? What Are America's Social Values? What Are America's Economic Values? What Are America's Religious Values? What

Is True Patriotism? and What Does America Need?

Because values evolve, contemporary ideas add a vital ingredient to this third edition of *American Values: Opposing Viewpoints*. Some of the viewpoints, however, were chosen for the timeless nature of their message. For example, Robert Bellah's description of America's civil religion, although stated over 20 years ago, remains a powerful argument today. If the reader completes this anthology sensing the complexity and uniqueness of the American value system, this book will have served its purpose.

1 CHAPTER

What Are America's Political Values?

**AMERICAN
V·A·L·U·E·S**

Chapter Preface

This chapter explores the political values that form the basis of American democracy. The first two viewpoints explore the foundation of America's political values. The last four warn of dangers confronting these political values and the remedies for these dangers.

Today, many Americans are disaffected and experience a sense of hopelessness about their political institutions. Many of these Americans argue that the best remedy may be to rediscover America's political heritage. The political values discussed in these viewpoints and articulated by the founders of our country may still possess the vitality to invigorate today's generation of Americans.