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Who Speaks to Liberty? Jewish Refugee Voices.

RABBI JOACHIM PRINZ' SPEECH AT THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON:
"THE PROBLEM IS SILENCE" (1963)

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S LETTERS WITH MOSES SEIXAS: PERSECUTION
& RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN EARLY U.S. (1790)

Who Speaks to Liberty?

THE PROBLEM IS SILENCE

Joachim Prinz, March on Washington 1963

"... It is not merely sympathy and compassion for the Black people of America that motivates us. It is above all and beyond all ... a sense of complete identification and solidarity born of our own painful historic experience.

When I was the rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the Hitler regime ... The most important thing that I learned under those tragic circumstances was that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. **The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence.** A great people which had created a great civilization had become a nation of **silent onlookers. They remained silent in the face of hate, in the face of brutality and in the face of mass murder.**

America must not become a nation of onlookers. America must not remain silent. Not merely Black America, but all of America. It must speak up and act, from the President down to the humblest of us, and not for the sake of ... the black community but for the sake of the image, the idea and the aspiration of America itself.

Our children, yours and mine in every school across the land, each morning pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States and to the Republic for which it stands. They, the children, speak fervently and innocently of this land as the land of **'liberty and justice for all.'**

The time, I believe, has come to **work together - for it is not enough to hope together, and it is not enough to pray together, to work together that this children's oath,** pronounced every morning from Maine to California, from North to South, may become a glorious, **unshakeable reality in a morally renewed and united America.**

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These remarks by Rabbi Joachim Prinz were delivered immediately preceding Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's famous, "I Have a Dream."

Freedom of religion, religious persecution, and religious equality.

For use with the Expert Learner Activity.

Expert Annotations - George Washington & the Touro Synagogue

Cherry in his 1790s as president

What was happening in the U.S. in 1790?

- 1st US census
- National Capital Compromise = birth of the
- Rhode Island ratified constitution and became 5th state
- First State of the Union address - Benjamin Franklin dies April 1790

George Washington's 1790 Letter To Touro Synagogue - in Rhode Island, oldest existing Jewish Synagogue in the U.S. of only 1 to survive from colonial era

Why is this important/relevant?

During a visit to Newport, R.I., in 1790, a year before the Bill of Rights was ratified, President George Washington received a letter from **Moses Seixas**, **warden of the Touro Synagogue**, seeking assurance of religious freedom for Jews.

well - Jewish community that first was new & small. There was no religious persecution?

1st rabbi in the U.S. arrived in 1840.

Has the meaning of persecution changed over time? Who truly are people persecuted?

Below is the transcript of each letter. Original spelling, punctuation and capitalization have been retained.

The letter from Moses Seixas to President George Washington

The meaning, as a reply for winning the letter

Below is the transcript of each letter. Original spelling, punctuation and capitalization have been retained.

To the President of the United States of America. IMAGINE WRITING THAT SENTENCE

meaning family line or ancestry

Sir,

Permit the children of the stock of Abraham to approach you with the most cordial affection and esteem for your person and merits --- and to join with our fellow citizens in welcoming you to Newport.

With pleasure we reflect on those days --- those days of difficulty, and danger, when the God of Israel, who delivered David from the peril of the sword, --- shielded (you) head in the day of battle --- and we rejoice to think, that the same Spirit, who rested in the Bosom of the greatly beloved Daniel enabling him to preside over the Provinces of the Babylonish Empire, rests and ever will rest, upon you, enabling you to discharge the arduous duties of Chief Magistrate in these States. This reads very "Divinely guided" announced, but I thought "Self-evident" fruits of gratitude to the Almighty disposer of all events behold a Government, erected by the Majesty of the People --- a Government, which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance --- but generously affording to all Liberty of conscience, and immunities of Citizenship --- deeming every one, of whatever Nation, tongue, or language equal parts of the great governmental Machine --- This so ample and extensive Federal Union whose basis is Philanthropy, Mutual confidence and Public Virtue, we cannot but acknowledge to be the work of the Great God, who ruleth in the Armies of Heaven, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth, doing whatever seemeth him good. Jews across the world, and especially in Europe were persecuted until 1790 emancipated --- they were not allowed to be citizens of common-law. For all these blessings of civil and religious liberty which we enjoy under an equal benign administration, we desire to send up thanks to the Ancient of Days, the great preserver of Men --- beseeching him, that the Angel who conducted our forefathers through the wilderness into the promised Land, may graciously conduct you through all the difficulties and dangers of this mortal life: --- And, when, like Joshua full of days and full of honour, you are gathered to your Fathers, may you be admitted into the Heavenly Paradise to partake of the water of life, and the tree of immortality.

Done and Signed by order of the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island August 17th 1790.
Moses Seixas, Warden

To the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island.

Gentlemen,

What's interesting is he never says directly "Yes, you can be citizens." He thanks them for their admiration and then quotes the Hebrew Bible --- but this the meaning inside/beyond the scriptural quote that actually gives the most compelling and clear answer: "If you have the right to liberty, safety, and inclusion among the citizens of this new country." And earlier he seems to imply hold be a hypocrite if he'd decided otherwise "If we have wisdom... we cannot fail, under... just administration..." "If it is more that toleration is spoken of... by the indifference of a..."

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Ava "I'm blushing"

While I receive, with much satisfaction, your Address **replete with expressions of affection and esteem**; I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you, that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport, **from all classes of Citizens.**

The Seixas letter lowercase "citizens"

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet, from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good Government, to become a great and happy people.

A "radical idea" of "equality"

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy; a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. **It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights.** For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should **deem themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.**

Increasing word choice = "Self-evident"

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my Administration, and fervent wishes for its felicity. **May the children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.**

Some scripture passages quoted again (from HANNAH F. PLOSKA, PLOSKA)

May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.

G. Washington

If you would like to learn more about religious liberty, please contact:

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