

## Loving America

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Dispatch from Haifa, Israel, Tuesday, August 21, 2018.

Somehow rooted in the deep divisions currently tearing America apart is the question as to who loves American more? Those on the left-wing side of the debate will say that the dream of immigration to the U.S., universal health insurance and taxation of the rich will contribute to the overall American vision of a better country and a stronger nation. On the right side of the political spectrum are those who say that high national debt and encouraging indolence along with welcoming immigrants who do not necessarily love America is a recipe for disaster.

At the bottom line, the debate is often about who loves America more. I recall my college commencement. The speaker, a person who opposed the war in Vietnam, began by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. He stressed "justice for all." Somehow that made an impression on me. Everyone claims to love America, regardless of their political ideology. That is probably true, for the most part, but it is certainly hard to accept those claims when we observe how badly those with diverging views treat one another.

The secondary issue in the "love America" debate is how foreigners think about us and how they treat us. Most Americans feel that those living overseas have very little appreciation for America's role in securing and maintaining democracy in the world. Not everyone feels that way, however.

As I write this piece, I am with my family in Haifa, Israel. Haifa is one of the great port cities of the East, where diversity is an understatement. Haifa is often cited as a model community where Arabs and Jews, along with many others, live together in peace and harmony. The large Rambam Medical Center, one of the greatest medical institutions in the world, is a location where east and west meet. We went there a few times either to get lunch in one of the on-campus cafes or to exchange money. The lobby and hallway were crowded by women in traditional Arab headdress, as well as people of many different complexions and colors. It is interesting that in Denmark and France, facial coverings are targeted from a legal perspective, whereas in Israel people may dress any way they wish. Perhaps the western democracies of Europe, who preach liberality to the rest of the world, need to wake up to their own hypocrisy.

One day, my wife and daughter went into a shop near the Haifa marina looking for water. The proprietor of the store said that they did not sell water and asked my wife where she was from. She promptly replied, "Williamsport, Pennsylvania." It is rare that you will find anyone in Israel who has heard of this place, and many would be surprised that "Pennsylvania" was even in the United States of America. New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, and perhaps even Philadelphia, people have heard of; but sometimes that is all!

The man in the store asked her if Williamsport, Pennsylvania was “in America.” She answered in the affirmative, and he proceeded to walk into the back of the store and brought out a water bottle which he gave to her, refusing to take any money. When Kim offered to pay him nevertheless, the man said, “We love America. Take the water and enjoy it.” The store owner then said, “We love America for her military protection, political support and the goodness of her people.” Kim briefly brought up the dissension in America over President Trump. The response? “We don’t care who the President of the United States is. We still appreciate America” and he repeated, “For her military support, economic help and the goodness of her people.” A bit of a discussion ensued, but the man still refused to take any money for the water and merely wanted to thank America.

How often do we hear gratitude like that? Israel, of course, among the nations of the world, is routinely beaten up at the United Nations which is controlled by Arab and Third World interests extremely hostile to the democratic and egalitarian nation that Israel represents. No such aberration has a history of surviving in the Middle East. President Thomas Jefferson knew this when he waged war against the Barbary pirates. Jefferson and his admirals and ministers, including prior President John Adams, realized that the political structure of the Middle East precluded acceptance of the enlightenment ways embraced by emerging Western culture. That Middle Eastern hatred for a “cancer” like Israel which insists on equality and justice simply cannot be tolerated in the Middle East. It is for this reason that, while the United States may be able to make economic friendships with totalitarian Arab countries in this part of the world, they are likely to be shifting and transient relationships.

I have often said, and I think about it every time I am in Israel, that Israel treats the Muslim-Arabs better than any Muslim-Arab nation does. It is in Israel where 25% of the population is Muslim that Muslims can go to college, own cars and property, walk in the streets unmolested, and enjoy the freedoms that we take for granted in the United States of America.

Most Israelis, in fact I never met one to the contrary, would agree with the man in the store who gave Kim the water bottle and refused to take money in return. Perhaps we should think about the unqualified love for America that most Israelis have. We can, in our country, disagree and yet respect one another and love our American values. We certainly have not always been unblemished. We have made many mistakes and we have treated Native Americans, African Americans and other minority people in ways that are indefensible and disgraceful. Nevertheless, in 2018, we have a lot to be proud of – not the least of which is our robust political system.

The upcoming election in the United States will be exciting because of the engagement of so many people. The Democrats are fired up, just as the Republicans were motivated in prior election cycles. There is a long time, relatively speaking, between now and the next election; but if the past is prolog, there is likely to be a cosmic shift in the American political structure. The question is, will love of America prevail over internecine petty political disputes? That is a question to be answered in the future.

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