

JEFFERSON EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

Book Notes #178

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What Does It Mean to Be an American?



This is going to be the shortest **Book Note** ever (I think). I know, I know, I've said that before and a couple of thousand words later had to admit "maybe next time." Someone once said to me that if you ask me the time, I'll tell you how to make a clock.

It wasn't a compliment.

Regardless, working on this week's **Book Note**, I found myself stalled, my psychic energy sapped thinking about the socio-political morass swallowing the America I love. Connecting a series of apparently discordant "dots" linking ChatGPT4, the Comstock Act, Angelina Weld Grimke, and Willie Mays somehow didn't seem worth the effort for, in the media-soaked background, a presidential contest between the ultimate, on the one hand, Baby Boomer, as in "self-absorbed, narcissistic, sociopath," [1] and, on the other, a geriatric fossil clearly not knowing when to leave the stage looms.

Which, if the stakes weren't so high, might be an entertaining spectacle. But the stakes in 2024 couldn't be higher, as the two competing meta-threads in **The American Tapestry** openly clash with one another more blatantly than at any time since 1860. On the one hand, supporting the "Baby Boomer," although he denies knowledge of them, is the Heritage Foundation's "Project 2025." In great, 1,000-page detail, it outlines its plan to end the American experiment by replacing it with a Christian, authoritarian government modeled after Viktor Orban's Hungary. While, on the other, is a candidate and party seemingly incapable of articulating a compelling defense of the American Creed.

Not quite having sunk to Edgar Allan Poe-ish depths, as in "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary ..." there came not "a tapping,/ As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door," but instead an email from reader Ned in Cleveland. Apparently thinking similar thoughts, Ned threw me this lifeline:

"I just started reading **The World of Yesterday** by Stefan Zweig. I was entranced by the end of the first sentence. He describes what it was like to live through the first and then the second world wars as "the most terrible defeat of reason and the wildest triumph of brutality in the chronicle of the ages.' It left him essentially a stateless person, not belonging to 'the people of my country any more than I belong to England or America."

Ned concluded with, "It got me thinking what I might tell him about being American?"

Zweig's **The World of Yesterday: Reminiscences of a European**, written just before, during, and after the Nazi Anschluss devastated his beloved Vienna, is a warning from the past that what seems so permanent isn't.

Echoing reader Ned, I'd like to ask you what you would tell Stefan Zweig, or anyone not from America, "about being American."

In short, I am asking, "What does America and being American mean to you?"

Send me your thoughts at roth@jeserie.org

In a future **Book Note** I'll share your responses.



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End Notes

1. For a further discussion of the failures of the "Baby Boomer" generation, see April 30, 2020's **Book Note #7's** discussion of Bruce Cannon Gibney's **Generation of Sociopaths: How the Baby Boomers Betrayed America** available at [Andy Book Notes--Boomer.pdf \(jeserie.org\)](#)
 2. Poe, Edgar Allan, *"The Raven"* at **Owl Eyes** available at [The Raven Full Text - The Raven - Owl Eyes](#) accessed July 6, 2024.
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