

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY



Voodoo was long a major tourist attraction in Haiti. In 1969, during François (Papa Doc) Duvalier's reign, U.S. sailors watch a voodoo ceremony.

missionary sects and some Catholics appear to be turning a political-religious purge into "a chasse à voodoo." Villagers circulate tales of a local Protestant minister who hacked off a *mambo's* legs, and a Catholic bishop who buried a voodoo shrine in cement.

Duvalier's Macoutes—voodoo's long-time corruptors and protectors—are unlikely to survive, the authors believe. But voodoo itself may be extinguished in the process.

Church and State

"Disestablished Religion in America" by Jeremy Rabkin, in *The Public Interest* (Winter 1987), 10 East 53rd St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

John Adams (1735–1826) once said that America's founding document—the oldest written constitution in force today—was "designed for a religious and moral people and no other." Rabkin, an assistant professor of government at Cornell University, argues that the nation's political stability owes more to this religious framework than is commonly supposed.

While the Framers made no mention of God, Americans appear to be the Western world's most devout people. Eighty-six percent call their religious beliefs "very important." (In Britain and Sweden, where churches are established by law, only 49 percent feel that way.) At the same time, while 77 percent of Americans claim to respect "the full authority of the Bible," only 42 percent can name the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Just what sort of religious beliefs are these?

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Reformed Protestant, answers the author: the religious strain that has dominated throughout the United States' history, and a primary shaper of the nation's values, either directly or by association. With its "disdain for ritual and liturgy" and emphasis on moral self-determination, reformed Protestantism formed the ideal complement to liberal democracy. (By the same token, 19th-century Protestant Americans' suspicions of Roman Catholicism partly arose from the sense that democratic principles were incompatible with papal edicts.)

The Constitution's commitment to separation of church and state proved decisive in forging a bond between them, says Rabkin. British philosopher David Hume (1711-76), who was much admired by James Madison, feared that disestablishment would evoke civil challenges from "charlatans practising on the passions and credulity of the populace." Eccentric sects did spring up in America after the Revolution, but none of them threatened the Republic. In fact, Protestant evangelicals saw Christianity as "the religion of liberty."

In 1840, a visiting German Lutheran minister scoffed that the typical American Protestant group behaved as if "self-sprung from the skies." By the 20th century, Protestantism's ad hoc character had become a feature of American churches in general. And, despite opposition from strict separationists, the nation remained bent on investing "public purposes with a sacred aura," routinely drawing upon ministers, priests, and rabbis to bless civic events—including sessions of Congress.

The Constitution implicitly recognized, concludes Rabkin, that "in the end our souls can neither be saved nor lost by mere governments." Nor, as it turned out, could religion alone serve America's spiritual ends.

Protecting the Dead

"On Harming the Dead" by Joan C. Callahan, in *Ethics* (Jan. 1987), The Univ. of Chicago Press, 11030 South Langley Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60628.

We should not, as the old adage says, speak ill of the dead. But can our words—or deeds—hurt the dead at all? The law says they can. So do some moral philosophers.

Callahan, an assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Kentucky, says that morality is not involved, and should not be invoked. What, she asks, does a person "possess" after his death? He can't take his reputation with him; that, says Callahan, is not something that is part of a person, but is bestowed by the opinions of others. Albert Einstein's reputation, for example, was something Einstein never controlled.

Even the discovery of an unpleasant fact after a person's death does not harm that person. Consider Jones, a prominent scientist. After his death, it is discovered that many of Jones's laboratory results are forged. This increases our knowledge of Jones, yet Jones remains the same person he was during his lifetime. His existence has not been altered by discoveries made after his death.

But don't wills reflect the wishes of the dead? That, Callahan argues, is "loose talk." When we say "Sally must pay her mother's debts," we do not mean that Sally's mother is handing Sally debts from beyond the grave, but