

politics are undergoing radical change. “There’s a tidal shift away from the black grievance and identity politics of yesterday,” writes Kay S. Hymowitz, a contributing editor to *City Journal*. “Blacks are talking a more positive American language of self-empowerment and middle-class virtue and marking a significant turning point in America’s ongoing race story.”

Black Americans are cheering comedian Bill Cosby for his shape-up-and-stop-whining message. Pragmatist Cory Booker has become mayor of Newark—and is exploring charter schools. National Public Radio’s Juan Williams has published “*Enough: The Phony Leaders, Dead-End Movements, and Culture of Failure That Are Undermining Black America—and What We Can Do About It.*”

For more than a half-century, the narrative of race in America has come from a civil rights script. Good versus evil. Black

versus white. Bull Connor versus Martin Luther King Jr. But for a younger generation of blacks, the “I-Marched-With-Martin” school doesn’t cut it, Hymowitz says. This generation of well-educated, solidly middle-class blacks is still occasionally annoyed, even stung, by racism, but doesn’t see it as the cause of every domestic problem.

To be sure, black/white inequality remains a national blight. Black unemployment is twice that of whites. Forty-four percent of the prison population is black, and 70 percent of black babies are born to single mothers.

Nonetheless, the old presumption that oppression is at the root of every evil rings hollow to many within the new generation. In 1960, only 45 percent of blacks lived above the poverty line. Now, 75 percent do. About 40 percent of blacks have now fled the cities—just as whites did before them—and live in the suburbs. Some 46 percent of black families

own their own homes. And black millionaires are no longer mostly entertainers or sports figures. Today, the top-grossing black-owned business in America is World Wide Technology, a Missouri-based information technology company whose clients include Dell, Boeing, and DaimlerChrysler.

The old lions of the civil rights movement still roar, and Charles Rangel and John Conyers, will have more powerful megaphones than ever as chairmen of the House Ways and Means and Judiciary committees. Jesse Jackson continues to command a following when he seizes on actor Michael Richard’s bizarre racist breakdown and demands to meet with entertainment executives. But a “surging, confident, and varied black middle class,” Hymowitz writes, is no longer content with outdated, self-limiting, race-based political leadership.

## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

# The Other Christian South

**THE SOURCE:** “Believing in the Global South” by Philip Jenkins, in *First Things*, Dec. 2006.

WHEN JESUS PROMISED THAT his church would last until the end of time, he didn’t suggest that it might not move. The southward shift of the

Christianity’s center of gravity has been recognized for some time, but how long it has been predicted, and to what effect, is surprising.

St. Vincent de Paul, writing about 1640, in the midst of the Thirty Years’ War, said that the church of the future would be the church of South Amer-

ica, Africa, China, and Japan. Today, despite some foot-dragging in Japan and China, St. Vincent’s prediction is coming to pass, writes Philip Jenkins, a historian at Pennsylvania State University.

In 2005, the last year for which figures are available, Europe was still the leading Christian continent, with 531 million believers, followed by Latin America, with 511 million, Africa, with 389 million, Asia, with 344 million, and North America, with 226 million. By 2025, a date less distant than the span of Pope John Paul II’s reign, the largest groups of the

world's 2.6 billion Christians will be living in Latin America, with 623 million, and Africa, with 595 million. By 2050, Christianity will be primarily the religion of Africa and the African diaspora, Jenkins says.

For the foreseeable future, the "Southern" church will include millions of the poorest residents of the planet. "Northern" Christians have expected these new believers to be liberal, activist, or even revolutionary. But while many of the new converts do espouse liberation, Jenkins writes, they combine it with a concern with deliverance from supernatural evil, which can be manifested in sickness, wickedness, and compulsiveness. Although some European and American Christians

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accept theories of the diabolic and demonic, most reject them as irredeemably pre-scientific. But in the dominant churches of the future, prophecy will likely be an everyday reality, while faith healing, exorcism, and dream visions will all be fundamental parts of Christian religious sensibility. The new church will

also likely be more conservative morally and sexually than the Main Street churches of the North.

Many wonder if this form of "Southern" Christianity is Christianity at all, or a remnant of an older "animism" in which healing, visions, and prophecy are paramount. Jenkins suggests a different interpretation: African and Asian Christianity will be rooted in the Bible, particularly the stories of the Old Testament, with its tales of famine and pestilence, sacrificial lambs, and kinship responsibilities. "For better or worse," Jenkins concludes, "the dominant churches of the future could have much in common with those of medieval or early modern European times."

## HISTORY

# Giraffes in a Coal Mine

**THE SOURCE:** "Audience for a Giraffe: European Expansionism and the Quest for the Exotic" by Erik Ringmar, in *Journal of World History*, Dec. 2006.

IN THE 15TH CENTURY, WHEN Europeans were creeping down the west coast of Africa in tiny ships in search of spices and gold, China's great eunuch admiral Zheng He had already visited Africa's east coast in ships five times as large. Before Columbus set out with 88 sailors on the voyage in which he would discover America, Zheng led nearly 28,000 men to trade with even more distant Mogadishu. Yet it was Europe, not China, that found and colonized the New World. Historians have always

attributed expansionism to an insatiable hunger for wealth, but the economic argument doesn't explain why the motivation was concentrated in the West. Erik Ringmar, a professor at Taiwan's National Chiao Tung University, finds a complementary explanation in an unlikely source: tales of pioneering giraffes.

Three rulers of dissimilar societies, republican Florence, imperial China, and Restoration France, were enthusiastic practitioners during the last millennium of the aristocratic hobby of rare animal collection. No species was more coveted than the tall, regal, and nearly silent giraffe.

The sultan of Egypt, seeking to

ingratiate himself with the city of Florence's first family, shrewdly gave Lorenzo de Medici a giraffe in 1486. It wandered along the city streets, raising its head to acknowledge admirers on buildings' second floors. It inspired poets and appeared in numerous versions of the *The Gifts of the Magi*—paintings of Oriental kings offering presents to the baby Jesus.

Crowds followed Lorenzo's giraffe, which was considered the very epitome of the exotic. They found it marvelous, and once they had seen such a creature, they wanted more. It was almost addictive, Ringmar writes. It was in keeping with this spirit of the city that within a dozen years of the giraffe's acquisition by Lorenzo, the Florentine explorer Amerigo Vespucci set off to explore the two continents that would bear his name.