



Chief Justice Roger B. Taney near the end of his life

a “degraded class” whose rights existed only on “the sufferance of the white population.”

After President Jackson ap-

pointed him chief justice in 1835, Taney wrote several opinions that, Huebner says, “reflected an emerging ‘southern rights’ argument that emphasized the need to protect the property rights of slaveholders by preserving state control over slavery.” Previously, slavery had been defended mostly as a necessary evil created by the nation’s early colonists. A polarizing political climate fed by the rise of radical abolitionism squeezed middle-of-the-roaders such as Taney, and Nat Turner’s

1831 rebellion “prompted a nearly universal response of fear and dread on the part of white southerners.” By the time of *Dred Scott*, Huebner

writes, “Taney’s thinking had evolved into full-blown extremism.” He now believed that “only states could control slavery, ruled that Congress could not prohibit slaveholding in the territories, concluded that the Declaration of Independence had no bearing on black rights, believed that slavery elevated African Americans, and abhorred the thought of emancipation.”

After Taney died, in 1864, just six months before the end of the Civil War, a pamphlet appeared comparing him to Pontius Pilate, inaugurating a continuing debate about who the “real” Taney was. Huebner doubts that a useful conclusion can be reached: “Taney’s changing views show that he was both a product and a proponent of this shifting discourse about slavery.”

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

How Religious Toleration Came to America

THE SOURCE: “Dutch Contributions to Religious Toleration” by Jeremy Dupertuis Bangs, in *Church History*, Sept. 2010.

SIX YEARS AGO, HISTORIAN Russell Shorto rescued the life of one Adriaen van der Donck from obscurity. Van der Donck, as Shorto told it, was one of the earliest advocates in the New World of a republican system of government and Dutch-style religious toleration. Upon the foundation Van der Donck laid, New Amsterdam flourished and its institu-

tions became a model for America. In the academic world, many delighted in seeing the English philosopher John Locke—traditionally credited with popularizing the idea of religious freedom—knocked off his pedestal.

It’s a nice yarn, writes Jeremy Dupertuis Bangs, director of the Leiden American Pilgrim Museum in the Netherlands, but no more than that. None of Van der Donck’s writings—published or otherwise—touch upon religious toleration. He doesn’t make any appearances in the colony’s

records arguing for toleration.

New Amsterdam was no beacon of religious toleration. The authorities discriminated against Jews, Lutherans, and Baptists, among others. In 1657, English colonists on Long Island sent a request to the New Amsterdam government for religious freedom for Quakers. The petition (now called the Flushing Remonstrance) was denied and not thought of again until the 19th century. It was hardly the forerunner of the Bill of Rights, as some now imagine.

“With sophistry bordering on hypocrisy, tolerant New Netherland offered its inhabitants freedom to believe whatever they wanted, as long as their belief did not extend to religious exercises outside the family circle—no preaching, no prayer meetings, no group discussions of theology.”

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Two Presidents and Their God

THE SOURCE: “American Scriptures” by C. Clifton Black, in *Theology Today*, July 2010.

GEORGE WASHINGTON’S FAREWELL Address (1796) and Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural address (1865) are standard texts for any student of American history. C. Clifton Black, a professor of biblical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, explores these speeches not to understand political philosophy but in a search for the theology, however unspoken, undergirding their authors’ perspectives. He finds Washington’s theology “predictably meager,” but Lincoln’s exploration of the nature of providence put to shame even the leading religious thinkers of his day.

In his farewell, Washington primarily reflected upon his decision to retire and warned the young nation to be wary of partisanship and sectionalism. Washington was politically wise, but he portrayed religion as nothing more than simple civic morality—for example, “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.” Black writes, “Theology—such as it is—does not so much inform and correct political theory as prop it up.” With only passing and superficial references to God in more than 6,000 words, the speech was nevertheless quite

Christian in character, extolling Christian virtues such as humility and brotherly affection, and warning against cunning and ambition.

By the time Lincoln took to the stage to deliver his second inaugural address, the nation was riven by sectional conflict, much as Washington had feared. Lincoln, unlike Washington, didn’t shy away from theology, and instead framed the Civil War in “relentlessly theological terms.” By Black’s assessment, no fewer than 85 of the 700 words in the address are either direct biblical quotations or allusions to Scripture. Lincoln propounded what Black describes as “a radical monotheism that properly elicits both awe before the Almighty’s inscrutable purposes and compassion for the thousands who died in the sincere yet mistaken belief that God was on their side.” At the heart of Lincoln’s address is the acknowledgment that men on both sides “read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other,” as the president put it. Only God’s eventual discretion would reveal which side he was on; why he allowed war to persist among God-fearing men was beyond human understanding.

Today Washington is often criticized for owning slaves, and Lincoln for suspending habeas corpus in wartime. Under the unrelenting scrutiny of our modern world, neither comes off scot free. But this would be no surprise to them, Black remarks. Central to both men’s understanding of the world was the fallibility of man—and they were no exception.

Bangs writes. One Quaker preacher was dragged through the streets behind a cart.

The Flushing Remonstrance was the product of a misunderstanding. Many in the English-speaking world of the mid-17th century thought there was religious toleration in Holland because the text of the Union of Utrecht (1579) had circulated widely in translation. The treaty unified the northern, Protestant provinces of what would eventually become the Netherlands against a perceived threat from the united support of the southern, Catholic provinces for the Spanish king. It promised that “every particular person shall remain free in his religion.”

But just two years later, under pressure from the Dutch Reformed Church (Calvinist), the Dutch government banned the Catholic Mass and shuttered Catholic monasteries and convents. The Synod of Dort (1618–19) marked the effective end of the Union of Utrecht and led to a further crackdown that encompassed even non-Calvinist Protestants. The English-speaking world was mostly unaware of these developments.

Dutch dissenters, largely from Mennonite and Remonstrant churches, continued to plead for religious toleration in their own country. Of particular importance are the works of Philip van Limborch, a Remonstrant theologian whose writings and friendship deeply influenced John Locke. Locke dedicated his 1689 *Letter on Toleration* to Van Limborch. It’s through the connection between these two men that religious liberty spread to the English colonies, according to Bangs, and reached Thomas Jefferson’s pen.