

# JEFFERSON EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

## *Book Notes #183*

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### Visions of America & The American Tapestry



What does America mean to you?

Answering that question dominates, or ought to dominate, this fall's U.S. presidential election. As Matt Bai said in *The Washington Post*, "Tim Walz and J.D. Vance are having the argument that matters." [1]

When I was outlining a new **Book Note** on the same theme, a friend sent me a link to Bai's article. I no longer read *The Washington Post* with any regularity, finding their current coverage of America uneven, repetitive, and a bit superficial. But I enjoyed Bai's article for the selfish reason that I have been making the same argument for the past, oh, I don't know, seven or eight years in these **Book Notes**, in lectures at the Jefferson Educational Society, the Chautauqua Institution, and on my podcast *The American Tapestry Project*, which can be found [here](#) and on all major podcast sites such as Spotify, Apple, and others.

In *The American Tapestry Project*, I have asserted that the story of America is a tapestry of American stories, but four thematic threads weave continuously through two major threads telling the American story. The four thematic threads are: Freedom at Home and Abroad; Freedom's Faultlines: Tales of Race and Gender: The American Dream: and, The Immigrant's Tale.

The two major threads are America's two competing meta-stories. One is a story of exclusion that explicitly rejects America's founding ideals while claiming that America is a white, Christian, patriarchal society reserved only for those who fit within those exclusive and limiting definitions. The other is an inclusionary story – what I call "the Fusion Thread" – telling the story of the ever increasing inclusiveness of the "*We the People...*" in our founding documents, the "*We the People*" who hold certain truths to be self-evident: that all people are created equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness while living in a society governed by a government of the people, by the people, for the people.

What Matt Bai gets is that J.D. Vance is an exclusionist who sees America only as a place and not an idea of human possibilities. He said, "America is not just an idea. It is a group of people with a shared history and a common future. It is in short, a nation." [2] Yes, but only if you conform to Vance's norms. Walz sees a

different America. It is an America of neighbors connecting with one another in times of peace and times of need regardless of where they might have come from, what church they attend (or not), the color of their skin, or what language they might speak at home. For Walz, you're an American if you believe in the idea of America – America's foundational values of liberty, equality, and opportunity – and anyone who doesn't like it should "mind their own damn business." [3]

Which is exactly right.

I've said all of this before in numerous **Book Notes**, but probably not as fully and completely as I did in **Book Note #111** in August 2022 concluding a nine part series on "The Seeds of Our Discontents." We're running it again today because it says everything I have to say in support of "The Fusion Thread" – which I believe is the American story. When I gave a version of this as a presentation in 2018 in the Hall of Philosophy at the Chautauqua Institution, my good friend, the Rev. Bishop Dwane Brock, said I sounded like a preacher.

So be it.

I am preaching the *faith* of America, the *idea* of America, the very essence that makes America *America* – the *spirit*, with all our missteps notwithstanding, guiding the greatness that *is* America!



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### Photo Credit

“DNC 2024 logo” at **Wikiwand** available at [national democratic convention 2024 - Search Images \(bing.com\)](#) accessed August 24, 2024.

“American Collage” (*Getty Images*) at **Forbes** available at

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/danabrownlee/2021/10/01/heres-why-bill-maher-is-dead-wrong-on-the-black-national-anthem/?sh=aa84c2c288fe> accessed July 30, 2022.

“RNC unveils 2024 Milwaukee convention logo (logo courtesy of Republican National Committee)” at **Spectrum News 1** available at [RNC unveils 2024 Milwaukee convention logo \(spectrumnews1.com\)](#) accessed August 24, 2024.

### End Notes

1. Bai, Matt, “*Tim Walz and JD Vance are having the argument that matters*”, in **The Washington Post** (August 22, 2024) available at [Opinion | Tim Walz’s convention speech was in striking contrast with JD Vance’s - The Washington Post](#) accessed August 25, 2024.
2. Quoted in Bai, *cited above*.
3. Ibid.

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