
What unites america...

Zip codes unite America. Our common culture is the dollar. It is the focus of our aspirations, the determinant of our ethics, and the goal by which we measure our achievement in life. We amass dollars, at any moral cost, by conquering the vast marketplace known as America, selling our product to the greatest amount of people for the greatest possible profit. We worship those who succeed in the marketplace, and shower those whom we admire (in entertainment and sports, especially) with money, and then worship them even more.

Zip codes are the key to what sells where, how to spend our marketing dollars best to make the most amount of money. Is this a cynical analysis or a realistic one? *Sh'ma* prints 5,500 copies of each issue. How many copies of *People*, *Business Week* and the *National Inquirer* are printed weekly?

Louis Berlin, North Miami Beach, FL

1. Americans are caring and generous in times of need or disaster.
2. Americans wish and need to build community (although the definition of community may be non-traditional).
3. Americans, by and large, still want to make the system work, even when the odds are against it, and even when we're complaining about the decline of practically everything.
4. Americans, even (or maybe especially) in this time of disunity, fragmentation and alienation, want to find a renewed vision and sense of purpose.

Susanne J. Greenberg, West Chester, PA

The ethic of voluntarism

French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville came to America in 1831. His travels took him all over the young nation, and formed the basis of his treatise *Democracy in America*. Perhaps his most important conclusion was that Americans helped each other in times of need. He applauded the voluntary spirit that lives in America's

heart: "When an American asks for the cooperation of his fellow citizens, it is seldom refused; and I have often seen it afforded spontaneously and with great good will." It is that calling together that unites America.

The uniqueness of this country's generosity impressed de Tocqueville. On the one hand, people's ability to come together around a cause. On the other hand, he saw individualism and self-centeredness. He states, "Providence has created man neither wholly independent nor wholly enslaved. Doubtless each man has his own circle of destiny from which he cannot escape, but within its wide circumference he is powerful and free." It is just this combination of democracy, charity and independence that has given America its strength. We need to reinstate these fundamentals.

Helping the Larger Community

We have a major challenge. We strive to maintain our cultural heritage. Some of us are concerned that as the country has grown, we have assimilated to the point that our ancestries are lost. de Tocqueville wrote, "...democ-

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racy makes every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him." This need not be. We have united for a cause; now we must unite for America itself. I look to the Jewish community and ask them to be part of this multicultural heritage and to help beyond their own people. I believe strongly that we, as a people, must cross cultures if we are to transcend our differences and eliminate the biases that exist.

The Jewish community does much to maintain its culture. But we are also part of a larger community seeking its own survival, a struggle that affects the Jewish community, as well. This larger community faces threats to its health, the threat of crime and economic turmoil. We face social ills that if not challenged may result in breaking the strength that de Tocqueville saw back in the early 1830s. Jews must view as multicultural the many problems which face this country and must participate in *tzedakah* as part of a coalition.

The United Way is just one example of the kind of multicultural involvement in which the Jewish community might participate. It helps build coalitions as it considers the social issues confronting the community.

Our Contribution to the Knowledge Society

In a recent issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* an article by Peter Drucker called, "The Age of Social Transformation" addresses the many social transformations that have taken place in the twentieth century. He purports that social transformations have not yet peaked and that, as we move toward the next century, significant changes will affect how our society responds. He speaks of an emerging "knowledge society."

The concept of knowledge is not new to the Jewish community. It has placed great emphasis on teachings, whether through the Torah and Talmud or through the classroom experience. Therefore, the Jewish community has the opportunity to play a significant role in uniting the country it has chosen as its homeland. If that knowledge is held for the province of their religion, we will lose the opportunity to influence the changing face of this "knowledge society".

Drucker's article also speaks of change that has taken place in communities as a result of the knowledge society. "The old communities--family, village, parish and so on--have all but disappeared in the knowledge society. their place has largely been taken by the new unit of social integration, the organization. Where community was fate, organization is voluntary membership." He questions who will take care of the social challenges of the knowledge society. He believes that neither the public

(government) nor the private (business) sector will be this caretaker but a new and separate social sector will emerge. In fact, such a body exists in the "nonprofit sector", which he describes as those organizations that increasingly take care of the social challenges of a modern society. "And most are community services concerned with life on this earth rather than the Kingdom of Heaven."

In this new social sector, the Jewish community can continue to unite itself with America. We offer a unique knowledge, a concern for humanity and rational thinking. Jews must join this effort if we are to survive the many controversial and troubling issues that face this country. Our success in uniting America inherently depends on involving all groups in the social sector.

Howard L. Shapiro, Oradell, NJ

HOWARD L. SHAPIRO directs the work of the United Way of Bergen County, NJ.

It was economic forces that stoked the melting pot of our national identity. Today, global markets, NAFTA and GATT are sweeping us all towards a borderless society. The citizens are restless as the coliseums of two of their major sports stand empty in the shadow of changing economic times.

A temporary sense of nationhood may emerge when our armed forces are dispatched to brandish our mighty sword. But CNN-documented invasions provide only an illusion of national purpose. A natural tendency to man the gates is weakened by the absence of the cold war and our ambivalence on the question of illegal aliens.

Court-sanctioned multiculturalism and political correctness are the response to a generally perceived loss of either an economic or security rationale for our nationhood. The history of man has marked a progression from tribes to city- and nation-states, empires, and most recently, continental unions. The reality of a global economy however, ultimately may usher in yet another form of "common culture". Perhaps it will be nothing more nor less than a shared software.

Marc A. Flitter, Erie, PA

That you ask. That we care. That we listen to the unhappy, and try to alleviate their lot. That we bend over backwards to pursue egalitarianism and a classless society, and do very well at it too!

That we volunteer. That we give unsparingly of ourselves. We give blood, and donate organs, and "help out" as Volunteer Firemen, Little League coaches, at hospices, and Meals on Wheels.

That we make extraordinary excuses for others, blaming ourselves. We failed to build "self-esteem" in criminals; that's why they rob, rape and kill. Our vagrants become "The Homeless" and it's never their behaviors, or addictions or sociopathy that is at fault, just we, who, somehow, let them down.

Despite our religious diversity, *tzedakah* has survived admirably well in America. *B'ezrat Ha'Shem* it always will.

Lili Krakowski, Constableville, NY

What unites america?

American Jews believe in America. This belief is what keeps us calm, keeps us moving, mostly moving forward and upward, keeps us here rather than in Israel. We believe that in America, Jews, even Jews, can be accepted, given opportunity, can live either without discrimination or with discrimination so mild as compared to what Jews have experienced in the past that it does not threaten our well-being nor impede our progress. This is our American Dream, and it has pretty much been a dream come true. In a nation of immigrants, we are no different, no more outsiders than other groups who came when we did, or came later.

This is the basic compact of America, the golden bricks of unencumbered opportunity which enticed the immigrant Jew. Though the promise of this compact has occasionally been breached, the words of George Washington, written to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport in 1790, have been fulfilled for America's Jews: "If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good government, to become a great and happy people."

The Place of Distinction and Unity

I have visited a middle school in Los Angeles where over 70 native languages are spoken by the students. English is their language of communication. One student, a recent arrival with his family from a Central American country said to me, "English is the language I must learn if I am going to have a future here in America."

I have met with the leaders of Koreatown. After the riots in 1992, Korean-Americans felt isolated from the rest of Los Angeles, singled out and victimized by other groups, and abandoned by the police. These Korean-Americans have learned that they cannot thrive in America if they live unto themselves. One of the groups they are reaching out to now is an enclave of Orthodox Jews, mostly Hungarian immigrants, who live about a mile away. The Korean-Americans and the Jews have struck a deal: on Shabbat and Jewish holidays, the Korean-Americans will patrol the Jewish neighborhood, and on Christian holidays the Orthodox Jews will patrol Koreatown. When Orthodox Jews from Hungary and Korean-American immigrants see each other, they no longer see strangers, but allies.

Americans want the same things: respect, economic well-being, freedom from violence, hope for the future, the ability to be the same in many ways, yet different in some. We Americans, group by group, seem able to recognize only our own yearnings, and not those of others. We need to meet each other more, to know each other better. Then we will begin to realize that there is so much more that unites us than divides us.

What unites America is built on the foundation of this world's oldest democracy, on the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. It is built upon the beliefs we share with the "Founding Fathers" and Abraham Lincoln. It is these firm American principles and the ever-green American Dream which form the assumption of what America has been, what it is and what it can become as a nation.

Gary Greenebaum, Los Angeles, CA

RABBI GARY GREENEBAUM directs the work of the Western Regional office of the American Jewish Committee. He is the immediate past President and member of the Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners.

When I arrived in America, a Jewish refugee who had spent the war years in England, I applied for US citizenship immediately and obtained it in due course.

My British fiancée followed me, and we were married nine months after my arrival. She said she had a perfectly good nationality and saw no reason to acquire a new one.

After a visit to England with two small children some years later, my wife applied for and obtained US citizenship.

She had discovered she had become "Americanized": she found the old world attitude of the "stiff upper lip", of putting up with things, had become alien and annoying.