



## **Reviews of The American Testament**

Dr. Adler wrote that a reader should not read what someone else has to say about a book until the reader has read the book themselves. Now that you have read the book yourself here is some material others have written about the book. We begin with the publisher's news release. Next we have a brief piece about the book from Publishers Weekly. Finally we have review by Bill Moyers published in Newsweek.

**Praeger Publishers News Release**

Maggie Geoghagen

Publicity Director

Undated

**AMERICA IS GUARANTEED IN WRITING**

Rediscover the political doctrine on which our nation is founded in **THE AMERICAN TESTAMENT** by Mortimer J. Adler and William Gorman, which is scheduled to be published on October 30, 1975 (\$7.95). This doctrine is set forth in the "American Testament," three inspired documents that embody the fundamental beliefs and ideas comprising our American creed: the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, and the Gettysburg Address. The authors' commentary analyzes what these documents were supposed to mean when they were drawn up and what they really mean for twentieth-century America.

MORTIMER J. ADLER is Chairman of the Board of Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica Director of the Institute for Philosophical Research, Associate Editor of Great Books of the Western World, Editor-in-Chief of The Annals of America, and Honorary Trustee of the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies. He was for many years Professor of the Philosophy of Law at the University of Chicago. WILLIAM GORMAN is Senior Fellow of the Institute for Philosophical Research. He is General Editor of The Great Ideas: A Synopticon, included in Great Books of the Western World, and an Associate Editor of the Propaedia in the 15th edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

**RAVE REVIEWS FOR THE AMERICAN TESTAMENT**

THE AMERICAN TESTAMENT is a powerful and exciting argument that basic truths are embodied in the conception of our democracy. Those truths, often ignored in practice, stand as vital today and for the future as they have been in the past. "—James Hoge, Editor, Chicago Sun-Times

"An American civics primer."--Kirkus Reviews

"This is a great book--great because it is an invaluable contribution to the Bicentennial and because it is a lasting, definitive text to which we can return again and again to review and reconsider the origins and purposes of the Republic. "--Bethnal M. Webster, former President, New York City Bar Ass'n.

"THE AMERICAN TESTAMENT deserves very wide distribution not only to adults for individual and group study and discussion but to schools and colleges throughout the country.

"--John V. Lindsay, Mayor, New York City, 1966-73

**Publishers Weekly**  
September 29, 1975

THE AMERICAN TESTAMENT.  
Mortimer J. Adler and William Gorman.  
Praeger, \$7.95 ISBN 0-275-34060-0

The purpose of this book is "to arouse a sustained, critical discussion of the American idea" through the examination of three documents: the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address. The book grew out of a conference held by the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies in July 1974, a pre-Bicentennial event, at which the authors were moderators. These three vital American documents are studied here by exegesis, a method familiar to Biblical scholars and others, one that "tries 'to lead out or the text the truth assumed to be in it" through a word-by-word analysis of the passage in question. The authors do not concern themselves with truths about the documents, only with truths in them. The study, excerpted in the *New Yorker*, is a stimulating one. It requires careful reading and is a valuable start for discussion about American doctrines that have been verbally embraced but too rarely practiced.

**The American Testament**  
by  
Bill Moyers

Published in *Newsweek*, July 14, 1975

There was something unusually somber in the way we just celebrated the Fourth of July. In the little town in Colorado where this reporter happened to be, there was a wild horse race, some fireworks, a picnic here and there, and no oratory to speak of. Back home, New York struggled to pick up its garbage while thousands of its employees reacted angrily over the pink slips in their envelopes, and no one seemed in a very festive mood. Will next year—the big one—be any different? From small town to big city, we are a perplexed and doubting people, wondering on the eve of our Bicentennial what we are about to celebrate.

Are we even "a people?" It hardly seems so, given the conflicts and acrimony of the last decade. Cities like New York are in trouble partly because the more affluent of us have fled the perils of urban life instead of staying and trying to make the integration of the races work. The Vietnam war left wounds whose effects we can still not fully measure, and the years of Watergate, with their lies and deceptions, drastically accelerated the contempt between government and governed. The manner of Gerald Ford has been something of an antidote to the poison in our system, but simply being nice has not altered the conditions that bedevil the American spirit or further divide us as a nation. One reason there was so little oratory last week was because too many people out of work, or trapped in slums, or wasting away in nursing homes—too many casualties of the hopeful slogans of America—couldn't take it any more, and many would-be tub-thumpers sensed it and fortunately kept silent.

### OLD TRUTHS

The immediate issues before the country are obvious and familiar: jobs, health, energy, housing, transportation, taxes and choosing a President. Beneath the surface, however, is the less tangible question of values: Are the old truths true? The great declarations we cut our teeth on no longer appear so self-evident. Is there such a thing as an "American testament"—a body of ideas and ideals true enough to be the source of a renewed sense of purpose among the inheritors of the Revolution who appear now disillusioned, weary, and pessimistic if not cynical? The relevance of such questions may seem obscure, but I think not. If it is no longer valid to speak of what once were "shared values," it seems unlikely the vexing practical issues of politics can be managed fairly, especially in this era of scarcity. Since the effect of politics is to determine who gets what, distributing less will be a wild and brutal scramble unless certain common assumptions constrain us.

This reporter is listening to these and similar questions and their implications in a seminar this week on "The American Testament," sponsored by the Aspen Institute in Colorado. Judges, scholars, journalists, business executives, lawyers and some other citizens with no official titles but considerable concern about the Republic have been trying, for the second year in a row, to get at the meaning behind the majestic words of the texts of the American experience, among them the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution and the Gettysburg Address.

### VAIN ERUDITION

At the first session last summer, we floundered. It seemed a presumptuous exercise in vain-erudition for a handful of distracted mortals, suffering from their own hangups, to try to ferret out what is true in what we believe. But we were meeting as the Presidency of Richard Nixon was crumbling, and the sorted revelations were finally unchallengeable, and we decided, for all our frailty, to continue, even to return this year. From it all has come a book by the same name—"The American Testament" written our moderators, Mortimer Adler and William Gorman, to be published this fall. From it has also come the not surprising conviction that the Bicentennial must be rescued from its exploiters. If it is little more than a parade of powdered wigs and plywood muskets and an occasion for the marketing of godawful products bearing some agency's official seal, it will be a farce.

Having just viewed a film on the recent re-enactment of the battle of Concord, marked on the one hand by the desultory platitudes of a President intent on getting re-elected and on the other by a frivolous "counter-celebration" of young people intent on getting high, I fear, in the doubting quarters of my soul, that it may be too late. But then, in a less skeptical posture, I know that the power of the ideas we have been taking for granted can also save us.

Consider the question raised earlier: Are we "a people"? If a common language were the criteria, as it has been through the ages—or a shared historical experience, or durable cultural traditions—one could say we are, despite the multiple streams of ethnic, religious and linguistic influences that have shaped us. But as Adler and Gorman point out the Founders went beyond a limited historical and cultural meaning of "people" to embrace the more enduring juridical definition proposed by Scipio in Cicero's "De Republica," that of "an assemblage of people in large numbers associated with respect to justice and partnership for the common good."

That is precisely what the Founders did: they made an agreement "with respect to justice ... and the common good." It was not an agreement strictly about power, or wealth, or government. There was a spiritual dimension to it, part of an unfolding perception of what was happening to them and of what they could become. For half a century they had shared, almost unnoticed by one another, the settling of a new land and the forging of a new spirit of liberty. The thirteen "New Societies" were becoming something new; they were becoming one. And these aristocrats and frontiersmen, these merchants, farmers and tradesmen, were becoming something that had never existed before; they were becoming "a people."

'WORLD TRIBUNAL'

Once it struck them, they were not content merely to assume their new station discreetly; they felt compelled to declare it "before the tribunal of the world." To assure that their peers and history would separate them from the past, and to help their heirs forever acknowledge a beginning, they registered the date of the event: July 4, 1776. It was the birth of a people.

To recall it is not, I hope, to indulge in chauvinism. Too often we have exaggerated our history or manufactured it to fit our ego; we know now that we share more in common with the rest of the race than a braggart youth would ever have conceded. What we celebrate this Bicentennial is far more than a past triumph, a glorious moment in history, or a finished act. We celebrate something quite alive and kicking—the endeavor of a people who have made an agreement with respect to "justice . . . and the common good" and in their heart know they cannot abandon it.




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