

From Oppression to Freedom: John Jay's Huguenot Heritage  
by  
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Good evening. Thank you Chairman Pulsifer, for your kind introduction. It is truly a pleasure to be again at the Homestead.

Tonight, I will deal with three questions:

1. When did the Huguenots come to this country?
2. What accounts for their rapid success given the conditions of their emigration; and
3. Vehemently opposed to the Pope and to Catholics, did John Jay's views of religious toleration reflect an understanding of the root causes of the persecutions endured by his family?

There were 3 waves of Huguenot emigration to today's United States, each corresponding to various phases of the 150-year long conflict between Catholics and Protestants in France:

The first consists of the 2 attempts at colonization of Spanish Florida in 1562-1564.

The second consists of those Huguenots who came between 1620 and the October 1685 Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, often having first emigrated to England or Holland before coming over.

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<sup>1</sup> © 2009 Pierre F. de Ravel d'Esclapon, delivered at the John Jay Homestead on December 4, 2009 for the opening of the exhibit "From Oppression to Freedom: John Jay's Huguenot Heritage".

The third, and largest, consists of those who, like Auguste Jay, left France after the Revocation.

In the middle of the XVIth century, tensions mount in France between Catholics and Protestants. By Papal fiat, the riches of the New World belong to Spain and Portugal. Admiral de Coligny, a leading Protestant, decides to send expeditions to the New World hoping to give the King access to its mineral riches, check the Iberian expansion and allow his co-religionists to prosper free of religious persecutions. To that end, he sends Captain Ribault, a Huguenot from Dieppe, on an expedition to Spanish Florida. In May 1562, Ribault and his 150 Huguenots founded Charlesfort on the Southern tip of Parris Island S.C., now home of the US Marine Corps base. This is the first Huguenot settlement in the United States. Ribault sails back leaving the settlement with 27 men, hoping to return 6 months later but he is caught up in the first war of religion, leading the defense of Dieppe but has to flee to England where he seeks the assistance from Queen Elizabeth I, but not before he is briefly jailed as a spy in the Tower of London. Probably while in prison, he writes a brief account of his voyage to Florida, the 1563 English version of which survives. The men left behind with extreme difficulty find a way to return to France in 1563, but not before having told their tale to Elizabeth I.

Undeterred, Coligny sends Huguenot Rene de Laudonnier, who had been Ribault's second-in-command at Charlesfort on another expedition. Laudonnieres establishes the second Huguenot settlement at Fort Caroline or Fort de la Caroline on June 22, 1564 with 3 ships and about 300 Huguenots colonists in what is now Jacksonville. A year later, Coligny sends Ribault to Fort Caroline with 600 men but Don Menendez, aided by a storm that destroys much of Ribault's fleet, captures Fort Caroline and kills all the Huguenots, because, says he, they are heretics and not because they are French. Less than 50 survive.

August 24, 1572: Coligny is assassinated in his house in Paris. This signals the start of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew in which thousands of Huguenots die throughout France.

Many Protestants flee from France after that massacre, mostly to Jersey, Guernsey, England and Holland. The Gouverneur, de Peyster and Bayard families are notable examples.

By the first decades of the XVIIth century, the Dutch Republic, and particularly, the town of Leyden, are home to a large number of Walloons, Huguenots, many of whom intermarried or married into Dutch families. In 1621, the "Walloons" petition, without success, the English King for permission to settle in "Virginia". In 1623, the Dutch West Indies Company grants them permission to settle in New Netherlands. The 30 families that embark on the Nieuwe Nederland and settle in New Amsterdam in 1623 are a mixture of Walloons and Huguenots. The leader is Jesse de Forest, a native of Avesnes, a small town between Charleville-Maizieres and Arras in France, where the local high school still bears his name.

Pierre Minuit, the second director general, comes from a Huguenot family that has its roots in Tournai. His secretary, the first provincial secretary is Isaac de Rasières, another Huguenot. The Rapalie and Vigné families are the first to bear children in New Netherlands.

When Peter Stuyvesant comes as Director-General in 1647 he brings over his wife Judith Bayard and his sister Ann, who has married Judith's brother, Samuel Bayard. They are the grandchildren of the Reverend Nicolas Bayard, a professor of theology at the Sorbonne, who leaves sometime after the St. Bartholomew's massacre and becomes the pastor of a French church in Antwerp. Auguste's wife Anne Marie is the granddaughter of Samuel Bayard and Ann Stuyvesant.

The Dutch West Indies Company actively encourages the emigration of Huguenots to the new world. One such emigrant, a

At the French Church where Auguste worships from his arrival in 1685 to 1725, he is in close contact with the Crommelin, de Lancey, Barberie and Le Boiteux families, all highly successful Huguenot merchants in the City. The treasurer is Elie Boudinot the grandfather of the Elias Boudinot, president of the Continental Congress.

What accounts for the unreasonable success of these Huguenot refugees many of whom in the span of one or two generations became the wealthiest men in their regions: Gabriel Bernon in Rhode Island, Gabriel and Pierre Manigault in South Carolina, the Boston Faneuils?

Yes, some, like the Huger, were able to come with their servants from the Ile de Ré; some, like Etienne de Lancey, left with his mother's jewels sewn into his clothes but most left with little or nothing, yet they succeeded.

The key lies in their either having a trade like the successful silversmith families of Le Roux, Soumain and Boudinot – or solid experience in international trade. At a time when banks did not exist and coin was scarce, commerce was carried on the basis of credit: Peter sold goods to Paul who signed a note promising to pay Peter, typically 9 to 12 months hence. For Peter to be willing to sell to Paul, Peter had to have confidence that Paul had the skill to resell the goods at a profit and would pay him on the due date. Because of their family relationships, scions of the great Huguenot merchant families (Bernon, Bayeux, de Lancey, Jay, Crommelin) were able to remake fortunes without capital other than their skills and the credit that was accorded to them. It is much easier to trust your brother or your cousin than a stranger! For example, the Jays had close commercial relations with their cousins the Peloquin's who had emigrated to Bristol. Stephen Peloquin was Auguste's brother-in-law. Their relations, commercial and familial, continued until the 1770s.

Anti-catholic sentiment remained strong in New York, as we can see from the prosecutor's arguments in the trial following the 1741 Slaves' Rebellion. This rebellion involved slaves owned by the major Huguenot families: James and Peter de Lancey, Brasier, Desbrosses, Peter Jay and John Pintard. Ben, Auguste Jay's slave, escaped from prison and was never found. At the slaves' trial, the public prosecutor, citing Pierre Jurieu's "History of Popery," argued that only treacherous Catholics sent to New York from French Canada could have instigated the slave rebellion!

Let us now turn to John Jay's views on toleration and ask ourselves whether Jay had fully understood the root causes of the persecutions his family had endured.

John Jay abhorred Catholics and the Pope. In the September 1774 Address to the People of Great Britain that he drafted for the Continental Congress, he wrote regarding Québec: "Nor can we suppress our astonishment that a British Parliament should ever consent to establish in that country a religion that has deluged your island in blood, and dispersed impiety, bigotry, persecution, murder and rebellion through every part of the world."

That's why he wanted "to erect a wall of brass around the country for the exclusion of Catholics." Tasked with drafting the first New York constitution (1776-1777), he tried to ban Catholics from owning land or participating in government unless they swore that "no pope, priest or foreign authority ... has power to absolve the subjects of this State from allegiance to the same" and that "they renounce ... the dangerous and damnable doctrine that the Pope ... has power to absolve men from sins..."

Thanks to Gouverneur Morris and Robert R. Livingston, both close friends of Jay's, the clause was defeated two to one. Neither was pro-Catholic, but the Gouverneur's memories of persecutions were dimmer as they had left France 90 years before the Jays, and

Livingston, as an active freemason, deeply believed in the religious tolerance that is one of the fundamental tenets of freemasonry.

Jay did get the naturalization clause to require new citizens to "abjure and renounce all allegiance and subjection to all and every foreign king, prince, potentate, and State in all matters, ecclesiastical as well as civil." (Art 42)

Gouverneur Morris introduced a provision that was adopted, stating that the toleration granted should not be held to "justify practices inconsistent with the peace and safety of this State" (Art. 38). In his biography of Morris, Theodore Roosevelt comments that "while absolute religious liberty is guaranteed, the State reserves for itself full right of protection, if necessary, against adherents of any religious body, foreign or domestic, if they menace public safety."

By that yardstick, the French State, personified by the French Kings, was fully justified in protecting itself against the French Protestants.

Remember that the Reformed Church structure put in place by Calvin had a consistory at the parochial level which sent delegates to the classis or colloquy then to the Provincial Synod, and finally to the National Synod.

Here is a partial list of acts that, were the shoe on the other foot, Jay and Morris would have denounced as "actions of a religious body menacing public safety":

-1560: the Provincial Synod at Clairac decides that each of its 7 colloquies should raise troops.

-1560: Amboise conspiracy: Protestants attempt to kidnap King Francis II.

-1561: the Provincial Synod at Sainte Foy puts in place a military organization for its colloquies led by colonels to whom the captains of individual churches report.

-1562: during the 1<sup>st</sup> war of religion the Protestants of Le Havre turn the city over to England.

-1567: the Meaux Surprise: Protestant conspiracy to kidnap King Charles IX

-1620: 22 years after the Edict of Nantes, 1<sup>st</sup> Huguenot Rebellion: the National Synod meeting on Xmas Day at La Rochelle decides to create a State within a State with its own taxing power and military command.

-1627-28: 3<sup>rd</sup> rebellion. Huguenots again appeal to England's King Charles I, who sends the Duke of Buckingham and 80 ships to help La Rochelle resist against King Louis XIII.

From the 1534 Affair of the Placards, because of which King Francis I changed his policy from toleration to repression, to the 1685 Revocation by Louis XIV, the root causes of the conflict are political. Religion is the pretext, not the cause. At the start of the wars of religion the French Crown was weak, which created a huge power vacuum at a time when Huguenots had become a powerful political force. They threatened the Crown militarily, politically and intellectually with theologians like Theodore de Bèze or La Boëtie, who argued that the legitimacy of the King could only come from the choice of the people gathered in estates general, and not from divine right.

The Edict of Nantes, heavily negotiated, reflected the then balance of power between the two camps. By 1685, the Huguenots' political power was no longer a factor, thereby depriving the Edict of its *raison d'être*.

After the Revocation the situation was a mirror of that of England after the Toleration Act of 1689 (Catholics and Quakers barred from political offices and universities), and of the German principalities after the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, which settled the wars of religion by establishing the principle of *cujus regio, ejus*

*religio*, reaffirmed by the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, the latter provoking the ire of Pope Innocent X who is reported as calling it "null, void, invalid, iniquitous, unjust, damnable, reprobate, inane, empty of meaning and effect for all time" The only fundamental difference between Louis XIV and his neighbors was that he did not allow Huguenots the corollary *jus emigratio*.

Did John Jay fully understand that religion was but a pretext for a power grab? We will never know. What we do know is that through the Federalist Papers he wrote, he actively promoted the adoption of the U.S. Constitution which embodies the principle of separation of Church and State.

Thank you.

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