

BLACK BLAME GAME

By Leslie Carbone

Scam: How the Black Leadership Exploits Black America

By Jesse Lee Peterson

WND Books, 224 pages, \$22.99



Growing up a slave on a Virginia tobacco farm, Booker T. Washington “had the feeling that to get into a school-house and study would

be about the same as getting into paradise.” His dream came true in 1872, when he entered the Hampton Agricultural Institute, working as a janitor to cover his expenses.

By 1881, Washington was principal of the Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Teachers, later known as the Tuskegee Institute, which offered academic education and practical instruction, in subject areas ranging from farming to printing.

In an 1895 speech, Washington offered his thoughts on the value of work: “Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life.”

That same year, W. E. B. DuBois received a doctorate from Harvard. He also became an educator, teaching for decades at Atlanta University. There the similarities end. While Washington espoused personal success through hard work, DuBois advocated social change through agitation and protest. Washington called for all people to take responsibility for themselves; DuBois argued that “the Negro Race... is going to be saved by its exceptional men” who

would “guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the worst.”

While Washington advocated hard work in a free market, DuBois promoted socialist black cooperatives. He joined the Communist Party in 1961 and renounced his American citizenship. He lived out his days in Ghana, where his home featured busts of Marx, Lenin, and Mao.

Black America, says the Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson (who is black), has followed the advice of DuBois over that of Washington, to its great detriment. In *Scam: How the Black Leadership Exploits Black America*, Peterson writes that so-called black leaders are no more than “problem profiteers,” effectively keeping others down by discouraging them from developing good character.

Peterson’s view is informed by his work as head of the Brotherhood Organization of a New Destiny, an organization that seeks to build character in black men. Peterson has assigned himself a daunting task: “The typical black male I work with has no work ethic, has little sense of direction in his life, is hostile toward whites and women, has an attitude of entitlement, and has an amoral outlook on life,” he writes. The entitlement mentality, Peterson says, stems from the belief that whites owe blacks for slavery and past discrimination. “They expect to be paid for doing little work, often show up late, and have bad attitudes while on the job,” Peterson writes.

Fearful of civil rights lawsuits or complaints, many white employers “are nervous,” Peterson reports. “A racist black who goes to work for a corporation poses a daily threat to the leaders of the business because all he needs to do is make a phone call to Jesse Jackson.... Jackson will march into town with his racist minions, and the negative publicity they generate will result in millions of dollars in losses to the corporation.” This lets many blacks blame racism for their problems and find no reason to work on their own character. Peterson also argues that “many whites now lack character as a

result of giving in to this fear for so long.”

Scam is an important book, offering straightforward and firsthand experiences. The history Peterson provides of the Washington-DuBois debate is valuable, as few Americans seem well aware of it. Moreover, Peterson’s recognition of the problem contains the seeds of hope.

Regrettably, *Scam* is marred by superficial analysis, as in his oft-repeated claim that God has ordained men to be leaders in the home and in the church. While this view is shared by many Christians (including this writer) and others, Peterson’s repetition of it without exploration is frustrating and fruitless. Rather than explain why restoring this order is vital to cultural renewal, Peterson rather lamely writes, “It is simply the way life works best. It creates order and harmony, as opposed to the chaos we’ve seen in our inner cities.... I didn’t invent this order.... Take your argument to God.”

Such flimsy argumentation pervades the book, leaving the reader disappointed after having his intellectual appetite whetted by Peterson’s common-sense insights. Still, the book, especially its early chapters, is worth reading, if only for the personal account of one who has taken on the admirable task of restoring character in a time and place hostile to it.

Leslie Carbone is author of *Slaying Leviathan: The Moral Case for Tax Reform* (forthcoming).

VERY PERSONAL JESUS

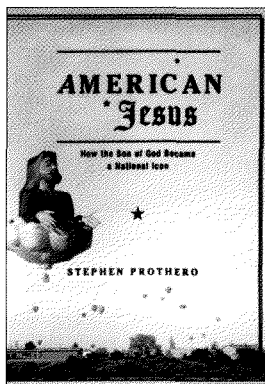
By Naomi Schaefer

American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon

By Stephen Prothero

Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 376 pages, \$25

During his frantic scramble for a Presidential nomination, Howard Dean claimed to be a committed believer in Jesus Christ. At least in the sense, as he explained to the *Boston Globe*, that “Christ was someone who sought out people who



were disenfranchised... fought against [the] self-righteousness of people who had everything... [and] was a person who set an extraordinary example that has lasted 2,000 years.”

Many who believe in Jesus as something else, namely the Messiah, will find offensive the idea of his career reduced to that of a nice guy who fought for the downtrodden. But Howard Dean, according to a new book by Boston University religion professor Stephen Prothero, is following a long tradition of reinterpreting both the person and the legacy of Jesus.

Dean’s interpretation most resembles that of non-Christians. In a Christmas Day sermon in 1925, Reform Rabbi Stephen Wise described Jesus as a good Jew and a moral teacher. Other Jewish leaders in this tradition, like Kaufmann Kohler, saw Jesus as “one of the best and truest sons of the synagogue,” “a helper of the poor,” and “a sympathizing friend of the fallen.”

Some religious groups have gone a step further. Many sects of Hindus see Jesus as a product of divine incarnation, though, as Prothero explains, they believe God has taken on a different human form on numerous occasions when He has needed to make Himself known.

Prothero also notes that plenty of Americans who consider themselves Christians have likewise imposed their own interpretations on the Savior. The first Christians in America, he emphasizes, were not all that concerned with Jesus. There was little room for the comforting face of Christ in Jonathan Edwards’s picture of a “God that holds you over the pit of hell.”

Prothero explains that “the Puritans were a God-fearing rather than a Jesus-loving people.” With Thomas Jefferson’s

infamous slicing up of New Testament pages to include only the words and actions of Jesus, and none of his miracles or the words of the Apostles, the portrait became even more selective.

Arguments over the image of Jesus have been at the center of this quest to define him, and Prothero offers an engaging analysis of the shift in art from the Victorian Jesus of passive femininity to that of Billy Sunday’s muscular Christianity. Whatever form He took, it was clear by the late nineteenth century that in order to be considered fully Christian in America, one had to place a central focus on Jesus. When the Mormons re-emphasized the importance of Jesus to their tradition in the 1890s, they were “Americanizing” and “Protestantizing” their theology, Prothero argues.

By the end of the last century, everyone wanted a piece of Jesus. Feminists claimed him as their own, some of them even cast him as a woman. *Yo Mama’s Last Supper* (1996) shows the black artist Renee Cox as a naked female Jesus, and Judas as the only white person at the table. Decades before, Marcus Garvey, Jr., the leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, had promoted a black Jesus, convinced “that blacks would never truly respect themselves as long as they were worshipping a white Savior.” Even today’s Nation of Islam claims Jesus as one of its own, rather than rejecting Him.

Americans have tried to divorce Jesus from Christianity, from the supernatural, from the Church, from the Apostles, and from the New Testament. They have affixed him to causes from the abolitionist movement to anti-drug crusades to various business models. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that the man who seems to be all things to all people has become a role model even for Howard Dean.

Naomi Schaefer’s book on religious colleges will be published this winter.

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Karim Koubriti, convicted this summer of terror-related charges, was a lottery winner from Morocco. So was Ahmed Hannan, who was convicted of document fraud in the same trial. The most notorious lottery winner is Hesham Mohamed Ali Hedayet, the Egyptian immigrant who went to Los Angeles International Airport to kill Jews on July 4, 2002. Hedayet came to this country on a temporary visa, became illegal when he overstayed his welcome, then applied for asylum, was denied, again becoming an illegal alien, and finally got a green card when his wife won the lottery.

• The visa lottery sets new chains of legal and illegal immigration into motion. No one wakes up in Mecca and says, “Today, I will move to Hoboken!” Immigration takes place by way of networks of relatives or friends already in the United States. The lottery creates networks where none existed.

Even 9/11 didn’t make much of a dent. About 2.5 million applicants from Muslim-majority countries applied in the lottery that started just three weeks after the attacks. Troll the Internet and you can see the lottery’s power to spark interest in coming to America. Using the search terms, “green card lottery,” Google returns 128,000 hits, including sites like dreamofusa.com, visaforyou.org, mygreencard.com, and hundreds of others. The lottery frenzy is so intense that crooked “consultants” have grown fat off of unsuspecting dreamers.

There is a Chinese saying about gambling that suggests it’s always advisable to “leave the window open to chance.” There is always a chance that some visa lottery winner will be a future inventor, entrepreneur, or other notable addition to America. Unfortunately, “chance” can go both ways, and in the case of this lottery, it already has. The sooner we stop rolling these dice, the better.

