



What Does America Mean? (Norton Library, N658)

Alexander Meiklejohn

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A distinguished social philosopher offers a searching argument on freedom and national purpose. Written at the depth of the Depression, in a time of deep national concern over America's future, *What Does America Mean?* was addressed to students, to the young who have been alienated and embittered by our betrayal of our own deepest commitments. It is the quality of the spirit that Meiklejohn seeks to define: "Our questions is not, 'Do Americans get justice?' but rather, 'Do Americans give justice?'" Today, more than a generation later, the book still demands of us, not "What's going to become of America?" but "*What do we mean America to become?*"

America's passion for "liberty," writes Alexander Meiklejohn, has blinded her to the real meaning of "freedom." It is freedom, not liberty, that lies at the heart of democracy, and we may be in danger of losing both. Our fetish of independence has permitted us to condone slavery, the betrayal of Indians and Blacks, and "the humiliation of the spirit of women . . . the crowning insult which a society has offered to the personalities of its own members." In this challenging essay, sensitively and scrupulously argued, one of America's most original social philosophers sums up the fallacies that have confused our purpose and recalls us to the methods of inquiry that led Socrates and Jesus to their supreme insights, "Know yourself" and "Love your neighbor."

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