THE KEY OF LIBERTY

The Life and Democratic Writings of
William Manning, "A Laborer," 1747–1814
Edited and with an introduction by Michael Merrill and Sean Wilentz

The rediscovery of the ideas and experiences of William Manning is a major event in the history of the American Revolutionary era. A farmer, fox hunter, and political philosopher, Manning was a powerful democratic voice of the common American in a turbulent age. The public crises of the infant republic—beginning with the battle of Concord—shaped his thinking, and his writings reveal a visionary mind grappling with some of the weightiest issues of the nation's founding. The Key of Liberty offers, better than any book yet published, a grassroots view of the rise of democratic opposition in the new nation. It sheds considerable light on the popular culture—literary, religious, and profane—of the epoch. The editors have written a lengthy and detailed introduction placing Manning and his writings in broad context. They have also modernized the texts for easy use and have included full annotation, making this volume an authoritative contribution to the American Revolution and its aftermath.

"This publication of William Manning's writings—with their populist formulations of the powerful few and the laboring many, as well as their libertarian defenses of individual liberties—has given a powerful blow for democracy and freedom. The meticulous scholarship of Michael Merrill and Sean Wilentz has unearthed a jewel in early American thought that still poses a challenge for us in these days of democratic decay."—Cornel West, Princeton University

"The writings of William Manning constitute a major contribution to our understanding of the role of American democracy, making clear the popular origins of democratic reforms, and the quality of thinking that emerged outside the political elite of the Revolutionary era.*

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RUSSIAN JEWS,
AFRICAN AMERICANS

A meeting was called a couple of months ago at the not-for-profit Jewish agency where I've taught English as a second language (ESL) on and off for several years to recruit immigrants from the former Soviet Union. The administrators of the agency's ESL division had decided that the problem of anti-Semitism among the immigrants should be addressed somehow. The nearly forty teachers on the evening shift were divided up into three groups according to the language level we were teaching. I entered an empty classroom with about fifteen other instructors who taught advanced levels.

As the supervisor—I'll call her Deborah—handed around questionnaires that asked us to write down our reactions to Russian-Jewish prejudice against African Americans, I wondered whether the incidence of prejudice among immigrants was rising at all. Or was it that a new anti-Semitism in America, along with an alarmist and sometimes equally mean-spirited response to it, had made an inevitable if ugly part of immigrant life appear more significant than it was? It seemed to me that even that the question—for African Americans no less than for immigrants—was whether prejudice could exist without hatred or the wish to do harm. Immigrants are not colonizers, after all. Many immigrants—especially the Russian-Jewish immigrants—uprooted their lives and journeyed to a foreign land in hopes of being colonized. They fight to be taken prisoner by new values. For a minority of the Russian Jews I have taught and known, their prejudice, violent and intractable, might someday result in a matter for the police. A larger number have no serious prejudices at all. Most have an antipathy, in varying degrees, toward African Americans, as well as toward other less vulnerable, but still marginal groups. Aspiring to be positively appropriated, so to speak, by their adopted land, they are hypoconservative to the possibility that they might end up as just plain victims, at the bottom of

the social scale. An anxious prejudice against a marginal group, one which they perceive to be beneath them, is like a dirty wind that surrounds them over the social abyss whenever they imagine a plunge downward. At the same time, the force of prejudice pervasively sustains them as they walk the thin line between healthy assimilation and the dissolution of their identity.

The teachers at the meeting about racism that night came out of a variety of circumstances, though everyone was white, and nearly everyone hailed from the upper-middle class. Professional ESL teachers work for the agency, but so do painters, writers, composers, actors, cabaret singers, photographers, playwrights and graduate students. All of us were grateful for the relatively easy money.

Deborah began by asking us for examples of racial prejudice among the clients. All the teachers had stories. Some of the responses to blacks were shocking. African Americans were "monkeys" and "animals." An insecure young man from St. Petersburg argued that black Americans were smaller than the average human—"a Jew saying this!" A man from Kiev insisted that a group of black teenage girls he had seen on the train were not communicating in a human language. Black English, in fact, was the most popular target of Russian-Jewish scorn. Conversations, especially over the phone, between black caseworkers in the welfare office and Russians caused the greatest anger. Having spent years waiting in line in the former Soviet Union, the Russians could not understand why their taking seven minutes to finish a sentence should drive black municipal employees into a frenzy.

The Russians shook their heads when recounting these experiences. "Impolite," they said softly. It was a favorite and richly nuanced word among them.
people voted in a classroom exercise to allow Haitian refugees into this country. One woman from (names erased here, however, wrote and mailed with tender eyes, who had been four months in America with her husband and two sons — her future! her hope! — tried to abstain. Her purse had been snatch by a gang of Black teenagers (who had little future and little hope and whose families had probably been hurt for generations) and she was not about to increase the odds against her. Her anger and hurt had been moving when she told the story; and the Russians had shifted uncomfortably in their seats, as they always did at the mention of crime or violence. Now simmering hands waved around her in an affirmative vote. On either side of her, I imagined seeing her past and a possible future, the brutal manipulation of collective instincts that had doomed Russia, and a sense of collective responsibility that could help save America. I had no idea of what she was thinking. But I certainly was not going to tell her what to think. The hands continued to be held high, directed upward. In the end, Irene shrugged and put her arm up in the air along with everyone else.

Semla Vlahav

THE DRUGS PRICE CONTROVERSY

President Clinton holds that pharmaceutical companies are overcharging patients for their medicines and that price controls are needed to stop the abuse. So far, it appears that Clinton may be more successful than Bush in bringing his own brand of drug prices to heel.

Which is not to say that an oversold and pugnacious pharmaceutical industry isanking into a sea of massig. But companies are showing signs of bending under public criticism. A few are seeking to develop voluntary price controls. Others are scrambling to protect profits and privileges. When the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) recently published a 360-page tome on drug costs and profits, seven companies, offering themselves as “Partners and representing some of the industry’s true giants,” countered with a two-million-dollar, ninety-day public relations blitz intended to persuade Congress and the people of their fair pricing policies. The Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (PMA), a 12-member consortium, is showering millions of dollars on the same cause.

Certain facts are not in dispute. Companies admit that price increases for existing drugs have tapered off and that the cost of many new and innovative medicines can be astronomical beyond that, consumers crumble under a barrage of half truths and contradictory statistics.

Simply to conclude that the pharmaceutical industry is rapacious in its pricing policies is to oblige all responsibility for understanding the complex entity that is half science laboratory, half marketing machine. Yet to accept its claims that drugs are fairly priced is to elevate naivety to an art form.

Pharmaceutical firms justify drug prices as cost effective, pointing out that modern medicines can obviate the need for expensive operations, hospitalizations, or psychotherapy. Although there’s truth in that claim, the industry is disingenuous in pushing the point. In its position paper on prices and profits, for example, the PMA notes that drugs available by prescription (average annual cost, $1,000) are as effective as bypass surgery (average cost, $40,000) in preventing heart attacks. Yet it fails to say that drugs don’t prevent surgery so much as postpone it. The only sure way in escape the scapel is to reverse arteriosclerosis, the disease that clogs the arteries. Drugs can rarely do this. Thus, the most cost-effective approach to artery disease remains prevention, which should start in childhood, not drug therapy, which is usually too late.

The PMA’s line on cost effectiveness contains other suspicious statements. Never does it reveal, for example, that the data used to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of newer (read “more expensive”) versus older (read “cheaper”) drugs derive mostly from industry-funded research. Some of the academic inks hired to perform the analyses assert that companies often bias the findings — by funding only those projects likely to yield favorable data, withdrawing support as soon as negative results emerge, releasing only favorable data in analysis, and seeking to control the content and use of the final report, including the right to have it published. Academics blame these practices on marketing personnel, who view economic analyses as a sales tool, and, unlike scientifc, are not constrained by the exigencies of the marketplace — the ethics of research methodology — their Holy Grail.

The most mindless of the best-buy arguments holds that although prices may be steep, prescription medicines account for only 7 percent of our annual health care bill. Thus, to impose price controls would hardly make a dent in the bottom line. Maybe, but that kind of thinking begs the question—