



**Calls for a New Politics of Respect and Generosity,
Rejecting Leftist Blaming and Elitism**

a review by Dick Burkhardt of

**Revolutionary Love:
A Political Manifesto to Heal and Transform the World**

By Rabbi Michael Lerner (2019)

- I took a look at Michael Lerner’s “Network of Spiritual Progressives” and tikkun.org many years ago. It seemed fine but perhaps a little to “touchy, feely” for someone like me, who’s deep into the horrific numbers of inequality, injustice, and climate catastrophes. Now, I get it, having been eyewitness to how some on the Left have gone off the rails into self-righteous and politically damaging ideologies of identity. I know that part of this is just a Left over-reaction to the stresses of dealing with both inequality and Trump’s scapegoating. But I’ve come to understand its deeper roots in the post WWII generations disoriented by amazing technological progress and a cornucopia of consumer goods on the one hand, combined with expanding corporatism, neoliberalism, and neocolonialism on the other hand.
- Lerner doesn’t delve much into these deeper roots but into the consequent cultural wars and political gridlock, calling out the condescending elitism of many on the Left, which has been promoted on campuses, in liberal media, and beyond. He learned all about this from eye-opening interviews conducted by his “Institute for Labor and Mental Health” (p. 120). This elitism ignores how the globalization and financialization of the US economy over the last four decades has hit the white working class harder than any other group, making a mockery of their supposed “white privilege”. It’s not just the economic losses, severe though they have been, but also the loss of status, respect, and meaning in their lives, epitomized by Hillary’s “deplorables” epithet – the labeling of a whole class as racist, xenophobic, etc. Or, as he puts it “When identity politics are uplifted but the needs of most white working class people, and in particular white working class men, are dismissed as ‘white privilege or male privilege’, don’t be surprised if many of them turn to the Right” (p 126).
- So what doctrines of identity are sweeping liberal institutions today? Ideologies like “white supremacy culture” and “white fragility”, whose language, though designed to guilt-trip affluent whites, has the enormous collateral damage of alienating the white working class, turning many into Trump voters. Lerner is to be commended as one of the very few on the far Left (he lives in Berkeley and identifies as “post-socialist”) who has had the courage to openly take on the campus thought police. For well-reasoned centrist perspectives on this, read “The Coddling of the American Mind” by Lukianoff and Haidt and “Political Tribalism” by Amy Chua. For a conservative perspective, which hits home on some issues, though it comes up short on others, read “The Diversity Delusion” by Heather MacDonald.
- Lerner’s ambitious political goal is to influence the Democratic Party, to restore it to its FDR roots via a Green New Deal, a party which honors workers, not monopolists. But if this comes up short, his call is for a “Love and Justice Party”, dedicated to a new “New Bottom Line” of “prophetic empathy” to overturn the primacy of profit in the “Old Bottom Line”. To be more specific, he calls for the Left to move beyond its “focus on economic entitlements and political rights”.(p 1) to become “respectful and caring to toward everyone on the planet, even those whose behavior we hope to change, and toward the Earth in all its magnificent diversity” (p 39), acting with “kindness, generosity, and awe” (p 2). Legally the goal is laid out as a detailed “Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment” to the US Constitution – a new social contract – no matter how aspirational this may seem at present, with a corresponding reconstruction of our educational system.
- This “revolutionary love” means everything from “restorative justice” for individuals who’ve broken the law to a “Global Marshall Plan” to replace the false security of punishment and domination by the true security of friendship and generosity: “We must approach the world with a deep humility and a spirit of repentance and offering of reparations for the ways in which the West has maintained its dominance of the planet through wars, environmental degradation, economic policies, and a growing materialism and selfishness.” (p 218). Spoken by a wise elder indeed.

