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| **Title**: Liberty or Justice: The History of an American Idea |

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**Author(s):** Philip F. Gura

**Acquiring Editor:** Joy de Menil

**General Information**

**Publication Date:** August

**Price:** 29.95

**Bisac Code:** Click or tap here to enter Bisac or category name, e.g. Economics.

**Page Count:** 240

**Trim:** 5-1/2 x 8-1/4

**Illustration Details:** Click or tap here to enter Illustration Details.

**Market**

For readers of Luc Menand’s *The Metaphysical Club* and Gura’s previous *American Transcendentalism*.

**Keynote**

Which should we value more – individual liberty, or social justice? A two times finalist for the National Book Critics Circle award invites us to grapple with this enduring dilemma through the prism of four key thinkers who helped shape America’s conception of what is right and good and just.

**Book Description**

Should a virtuous society value the good of the community over individual freedom? This question has been at the heart of the American experiment ever since the arrival of the pilgrims and divides us still. *Liberty or Justice* traces this vital debate through the lives of four towering American thinkers.

Philip Gura begins his nimble tale with Jonathan Edwards, a fiery preacher who insisted that God would reward those who embraced social cooperation. One generation later, the Founding Fathers grounded their own project of civic renewal in rights and freedom. But if every citizen is guaranteed life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, does this mean America is a nation where the individual reigns supreme? Or, as all men and women are created equal, is it one in which everyone should care for one another? Over time, we have sought to hold these opposing value systems in delicate balance, promising both Liberty *and* Justice for all.

America’s young democracy soon found its prophet in Ralph Waldo Emerson, who preached a gospel of self-reliance, small government and self-improvement. But with the coming of the Civil War, Emerson’s triumphant individual became a cog in a vast war machine. Radical technological transformations and the excesses of the Gilded Age convinced the naturalist-turned-philosopher William James that the self was more fragmented and fragile than Emerson believed. He found virtue in pluralism and diversity, seeing selfishness as the cardinal sin. Two world wars and several failed revolutions later, John Rawls, shaken by the divisions of Vietnam, sought to establish a new secular foundation for social cooperation.

A riveting story of faith, politics, and ideas, *Liberty or Justice* brings to life four of America’s greatest thinkers, whose dialogue across the ages has never been more relevant.

**Sales Points**

**Two-Times National Book Critics Circle Award Finalist**: Gura’s *American Transcendentalism* is a classic, chosen by the Washington Post as one of the Best Books of the Year, glowingly reviewed in the Boston Globe, SF Chronicle, LA Times, and a finalist, along with *Man’s Better Angels*, for the National Book Critics Circle Award. He is widely regarded as one of America’s foremost intellectual historians and edited the Library of America’s edition of the writings of Jonathan Edwards.

**Juicy and Relevant Central Concept**: The country is divided around the ideas that are at the heart of this book. It explains movements on both ends of the political spectrum, from the ‘get government out of my life’ right to the ‘more government is the answer’ left. No question is more central to our public debate than that of unfettered individualism and the breakdown of the social contract.

**Compelling Tale of People and Ideas**: Like *Metaphysical Club*, this fuses the biography of Gura’s iconic protagonists – Jonathan Edwards, Emerson, William James and John Rawls – with a lively account of their intellectual trajectory and competing interests. It shows how the big ideas animating the book clashed and evolved over time.

**Praise from Michael Dirda for American Transcendentalism**: “Philip Gura writes a lean, impassioned prose, chockablock with anecdote and information. By mixing a dozen brief biographies with sustained narrative about contemporary religious belief, social commitment, just and unjust wars…Gura underscores how much we remain the descendants of these still too little known thinkers and crusaders…exciting, even eye-opening.” – Michael Dirda, *Washington Post*

**Author Bio**

Click or tap here to enter Author Bio.

Philip Gura is the William S. Newman Distinguished Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of American Transendentalism: A History, which was a finalist for the National Books Critics Circle award, and Man’s Better Angels: Romantic Reformers and the Coming of the Civil War, also a finalist for the National Books Critics Circle Award, and edited the volume on Jonathan Edwards for the Library of America.

**Previous and Comparable Books**

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| Title | Author | Publisher | ISBN | Price | Pub Date | Cloth Sales |
| *Man’s Better Angels* | Philip F. Gura | Harvard University Press | 9780674659544 | 29.95 | 4/10/2017 | 1,199 |
| *Metaphysical Club* | Luc Menand | FSG | 9780374528492 | 18.00 (pbk) | 4/10/2002 | 60,237 (pbk) |
| *American Transcendentalism* | Philip F. Gura | Hill & Wang | 9780809034772 | 27.50 | 11/13/2007 | 3,508 hc. 4,322 pbk. |
| *Why They Marched* | Susan Ware | HUP |  |  |  |  |
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