

*What it means to be an
American*

Civic Education Enrichment Course,
South Bay, Fl

By Gary S. Field

Instructor: Dr. Marshall DeRosa

Professor of Political Science

Florida Atlantic University

Boca Raton, Fl.

What it means to be an American

In 1974 I was given a scholarship to a New England Prep school. Going from the "Inner-City" to a country club environment, I had quite a bit of adjusting to do.

One weekend, I joined a group of students and took the school van to a nearby Ice-cream Parlor. While waiting in line, I saw a little 5-yr old girl. She was beautiful! She had blond hair, blue eyes, rosy cheeks and dimples, with a smile that lit up the room. I was about to tell her mother what a beautiful child she was when she spotted me and said, "Look Mom, A Nigger!"

I began by saying that I was "given" a scholarship.... Well, I earned it that day. You see, I was smarter than a five year old. I knew, first of all, that the little girl didn't wake up one day and decide that "some people were niggers." That lie was planted like the fruit of a poisoned tree.

As I considered the topic for this essay, "What it means to be an American," I realized that I would be remiss if I attempted to provide a simple answer to such a complex question. As I began covering the lessons in *The 5000 Year Leap: A Miracle That Changed the World*, (Skousen, W. Cleon. National Center for Constitutional Studies.) I began to realize the magnitude of importance attached to such a question, especially now, during another tumultuous time in our Nations development. A time in which, some people find something the matter with those who say "Black Lives Matter."

I continued to think, perhaps for the first time, what it really means to be an American as I rolled through the Chapters of *The 5000 Leap*, and studied the **28 Principles of Liberty** covered in the material. Through my reading and the class discussions, I could clearly see how those principles aligned with the Founding Documents, but I also glimpsed disconcerting shadows of what would turn out to be the cracks in the foundation. "Cracks" which would lead, in turn, to civil war, civil unrest, and today's apparent lack of civility in so many areas.

The lessons (Principles) which had the most impact on me were :

1) The acknowledged Role of the Creator, which the founders looked upon as the " hand of God," and how it actually influenced, guided and governed them as they formed and adopted our new system of government.

2) The need ^{FOR} of virtuous and moral leaders.

3) The paramount importance of an educated electorate.

Looking through the lens of history, reflecting upon my own personal experiences, and drawing from the materials covered in *The Great Leap*, I want to discuss those **Three Principles**, and how they influenced my thoughts upon "What it means for me to be an American". I would like to examine all of those things by considering them in light of the past, present and ^{the} future. In doing so, it is my hope that it will strengthen my resolve and help me to formulate a positive plan of action for when I am released. The

end of this sentence will begin a new chapter in my life and I still believe in happy endings. I am determined to leave prison not as a bitter man, but as a better person. A person who now has a better understanding, not only of my rights, as an American, but also the reciprocal duties and responsibilities that come along with that great honor.

I mentioned that I would like to examine the 3 Principles that had the biggest impact on me in light of the **past, present and future**. I'll attempt to do so by considering the following questions: *FOUNDS:*

- 1) The socio-political and economic factors which brought the Founding Fathers together as well as the roadmap for change and blueprint for progress which gave birth to (shaped) a Nation.
 - 2) How the wheels came off and the Founding Father's ideas of and plans for the United States of America seem to have devolved into a dysfunctional and bitterly divided Nation, rather than the **United States of America** that they had envisioned.
 - 3) How can we find within ourselves the bedrock of faith, strength and virtue which might enable us to right the ship of state and steer a course based upon those original principles of Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.
- 1) **The socio-political and economic factors which brought the Founding Fathers together as well as the roadmap for change and blueprint for progress which gave birth to our Nation.**

It's been said that men do not shape destiny, but rather destiny produces the man for the hour. Looking back through the lens of history upon the events which led to the formation and signing of the United States Constitution, it can be said that Providence decreed, and then Destiny conspired to produce that extraordinary group of men who were able to take part in that **5000 year leap** which, literally, changed the world.

When the Constitutional Convention met in May 1787, it was during a delicate, precarious and tumultuous time in our young Nation's history. In order to appreciate the Miracle that took place, we must look back at the tidal wave of change that had carried those men to the forefront of what would be known as "**The Miracle that changed the World.**"

It had only been 13 years since the 1st Continental Congress had convened in Carpenter's Hall, Philadelphia on 9/05/1774. They had met to consider and act upon problems arising from what had come to be known as "The Intolerables Act" which was passed by the British Parliament. (The Intolerables Act was also known as The Coercive Laws.)

Those four laws passed by the British Parliament 1774 were:

- 1) The Boston Port Act closed the port to all trade until destroyed tea ^{was} paid for.
- 2) The Massachusetts Government Act revoked the colony's charter and forbade town meetings, except by the written consent of the colony's British governor.
- 3) The Quartering Act required the colonists to provide quarters for the British soldiers.
- 4) The Impartial Administration of Justice Act removed British officials from the jurisdiction of Massachusetts courts.

(Parliament also enacted the Québec Act at this time, and many colonists considered it one of the Intolerable Acts [The 5th] because it expanded the territory of Québec and did not allow for representative government in that colony.)

In tracing the Hand of God which they referred to as "Divine Providence," **(The acknowledged Role of the Creator)** it should be recognized that the first meeting of the Continental Congress was the result of a Day of Prayer and Fasting. That "Day of Prayer and Fasting" was held in Virginia by those in sympathy with the Massachusetts Colony regarding those four laws enacted by Britain in retaliation for the Boston Tea Party. It was shortly after, and as a result of that day, that the Continental Congress was first proposed.

As we consider the miraculous document which came to be known as the U.S. Constitution, I'd like to acknowledge and explore the tremendous challenges faced by the founding Fathers as they met to hammer out an alternative to the Articles of Confederation which had gotten them to that point.

The War had ended a few years before and the new Nation was in a precarious position. There was a \$25 million dollar war debt, widespread economic depression, ^{and} property owners were being foreclosed upon; there was also political unrest, and mounting civil disobedience as exemplified by Shay's rebellion. All of this as Britain and Spain cast a covetous eye upon the newly formed Nation and waited for an opportunity to pounce.

A Politician thinks of the next **ELECTION**, **But** a Statesman thinks of the next Generation. The founding Fathers somehow tapped into a bedrock of faith and found the courage from which to consider the Formation and Birth of a Nation. It must also be noted that these men were in a unique position to ride the tidal wave of change that carried them to the forefront of what would soon be recognized as a watershed moment of change and progress. It was, indeed, as if Providence decreed and then Destiny conspired to produce that extraordinary group of men who were able to take part in that **5000 year leap**.

As Skousen points out on p. 32, (Skousen, W. Cleon. *The 5000 year Leap: A Miracle That Changed the World*. National Counsel for Constitutional Studies.), there was a remarkable unanimity in the fundamental beliefs of the Founders. Although their backgrounds varied, whether they were homeschooled, or having studied classical curriculums ^{at} Harvard, Oxford or Cambridge, they were mostly products of the same foundational knowledge. They'd used an understanding of Natural Law and the Magna Carta as springboards from which to embrace what was known as the AGE OF REASON.

"The thinking of Polybius, Cicero, Thomas Hooker, Thomas Coke, Montesquieu, Blackstone, John Locke, and Adam Smith salt and peppered their writings and conversations. They were also careful students of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and even though some did not belong to any Christian denomination (many were Deists), the teachings of Jesus were held in universal respect and admiration."

Their historical readings included a broad perspective of Greek, Roman, Anglo Saxon, European, and English history...." (Skousen p.32) All things considered Destiny had conspired to produce an extraordinary group of men: Men of honor, integrity and virtue.

*Lives of great men remind us
We can make our lives sublime
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints in the sands of time*
Henry Wm Longfellow

- 2) **How did the wheels come off and the Founding Father's ideas of and plans for the United States of America seems to have devolved into a dysfunctional and bitterly divided Nation rather than the "United" States of America that they had envisioned.**

If we can see further than our forefathers it is because we are standing on the shoulders of those giants.

When this nation was founded over 239 years ago, our forefathers used as some of their guiding principles, "...Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."- We have come to realize, as a nation, that it is not just "Life," but the quality of that life. Not just "Liberty," but the freedom to rise above our circumstances. Not just "Happiness," but the satisfaction that came from knowing that we would be provided with the tools and given the opportunity to reach our potential.

As we learned from the reading, the convention lasted for over 4 months and there was constant "brainstorming discussions" which would "require frequent shifting of opinions and changing of minds." The object was consensus, and part of the miracle of that Convention was that those 56 individuals were able to overcome their differences and agree on all but three contentious issues. Namely: 1) The issue of Slavery 2) Proportionate representation, and 3) The regulation of commerce. Clearly they were able to reach a consensus as to points 2 and 3 eventually, but that first issue of slavery was never fully resolved. As a matter of fact the words **slave and slavery** did not appear in the Constitution written in 1787. However, to paraphrase J.R. Tolkien, it pays not to leave a dragon out of your calculations when you have one in your neighborhood. (We all have a little Obi Wan Kenobi in us. 😊)

An unexamined idea, to paraphrase Socrates, is not worth having; and a society whose ideas are never explored for possible error may eventually find its foundation insecure.

Let us consider that some of the ideas of the founding fathers have been proven by time to be inappropriate as regards certain citizens or even what constitutes citizenship. The constitution itself has to be viewed through the lens of the cultural changes that have taken place since that time. It can be considered that they were mistaken in certain areas based upon a combination of cultural misunderstandings as well as deliberate biases. It is also quite possible that they overlooked certain things that they **knew** were wrong simply for the sake of expediency. It can be said, for that reason, that the very foundations upon which The U.S. Constitution was premised must be reexamined in the light of these greater truths.

during the 18th

The greatest minds of Socrates times cannot be faulted for their mistaken notions of the world being flat. Of course that does not invalidate their wonderful philosophic journeys whose waves we still ride. However we must reexamine the premises which sprang from those mistaken ideas if we are to validate our place and position in the universe of which we are a part. The universal nature of man is no less as important a consideration as we examine some of the errors of the Founding Father that may have been rectified with amendments (as per article V of the Bill of Rights), but perhaps have left lasting scars.

"The historian must not try to know what truth is if he values his honesty; for, if he cares for his truths, he is certain to falsify his facts." Henry (brooks) Adams 1838-1918

The original draft of the Declaration of Independence- to which notable persons, including Thomas Paine, contributed, states:

"He (King George) has waged a cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere.... Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold... he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms amongst us, and to purchase their liberty of which he has deprived them;... thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another."

This, the most important excision, relating to the slave trade, was according to Jefferson himself, "struck out in compliance to S. Carolina and Georgia, who had never attempted to restrain importation of slaves and who on the contrary still wish to continue it."

One of the things that leap off of the pages in this study was the fact that the Founding Fathers had a much better political yardstick for the measuring of the political power in any particular system of Government. They did not have to flounder over the extremes of communism on the left and fascism on the right. It was simply Peoples Law or Rulers Law. Tyranny on the one hand and anarchy on the other made it much easier to see the need for a balanced center from which to start.

They were also well acquainted with and ^{were} adherents to Cicero's Fundamental Principles of Natural Law (Skousen p.39 & 40) "The Law of Nature or Nature's God is eternal in its basic goodness; it is universal in its application. It is a code of 'right reason' from the Creator Himself."

The Founding Fathers were also guided by their concepts of Anglo-Saxon Common Law and the People's Law of Ancient Israel. "...the principle characteristics of both the People's Law of ancient Israel and those of the Anglo-Saxons were nearly identical, they were set up as a commonwealth of freemen. A basic tenet was: 'Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.' (Leviticus 25:10)"

This inscription appears on the American Liberty Bell. (Skousen p. 15)

So that there's no confusing terms when it comes to "Liberty" and "Slavery" which is where this particular train of thought is going, "...whenever the Israelites fell into the temptation to have slaves or bond-servants, they were reprimanded. Around 600 B.C., a divine reprimand was given through Jeremiah: "Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming Liberty everyone to his brother, and every man to his neighbor: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord.'" (Jeremiah 34:17) (Skousen p.15)

Anyone with even a tenuous grasp of Old Testament scripture will realize the continued disobedience, on the part of the people of Israel, brought upon them the chastisement of a righteous God. They had come out from under the Blessings as described in Deut. 28:1-14 and fell under the curses as enumerated in Deuteronomy 28:14-68. In fact, 70 Years of captivity by the Babylonians followed their failure to heed Jeremiah's continued warnings.

"However we may define man, a single definition will apply to all. This is sufficient proof that there is no difference in kind between man and man... IN FACT, THERE IS NO HUMAN BEING OF ANY RACE WHO, IF HE FINDS A GUIDE, CANNOT ATTAIN TO VIRTUE (William Ebenstein, Great Political Thinkers [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963], pp122-23.)

"He who does not bellow the truth when he knows the truth makes himself the accomplice of liars and forgers..." (Charles Peguy 1873-1914, French Catholic Writer)

On the issue of slavery, in an address on, appropriately enough, *"The Meaning of July 4th for the American Negro."* Rochester, New York. 7/5/1854, Frederic Douglas said:

Fellow citizens, I will not enlarge further on your national inconsistencies. The existence of slavery in this country brands your republicanism as a sham, your humanity as a base pretense, and your Christianity as a lie. It destroys your moral power abroad; it corrupts your politicians at home. It saps the foundations of religion; it makes your name a hissing and a bye-word to a mocking earth. It is the antagonistic force in your government, the only thing that seriously disturbs and endangers your Union.

It fetters your progress, it is the enemy of improvement; the deadly foe of education; it fosters pride; breeds indolence; it promotes vice; it shelters crime; it is a curse of the earth that supports it; and yet you cling to it as if it were the sheet anchor of all your hopes.

In 1844, amid furious congressional debates, an Alabama Congressman accused John Quincy Adams of having told Blake that "The day of your redemption was bound to come and that, whether it came in peace or in blood, let it come.... Without rising from his seat, Adams declared; "I say now, let it come." Then, after a comment by the Alabamian, he roared, "Though it cost the blood of millions of white men, let it come! Let justice be done though the heavens fall." (www.robertlanders.com , *Prophet of Abolition*)

Is it possible that seeds of failure were planted in the soil of the founding fathers inability to reach a consensus on the issue of slavery?

Of course we know today that the issue that they were unable to resolve at the time of the signing of the Constitution played a role in a later civil war which threatened to tear this Nation apart.

Over 177 years after the Formation of the Declaration of Independence, and 77 years after Frederic Douglas' 4th of July address on "**What it means to be an American**," W.E.B. Dubois said:

"Color line is the great problem of this century... Back of the problem of race and color lies the greater problem which both obscures and implements it; and that is the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellowmen; that to maintain this privilege men have Waged war until today war tends to become universal and continuous, and the excuse for this war continues largely to be color and race. "(W.E.B. Dubois Quoted in *The Independent*, May 1964)

He who will not reason is a bigot; he who cannot is a fool; and he who dares not is a slave. Wm Drummond of Hawthornden 1585-1649 ,Scottish poet.

"Bigotry has no head and cannot think; no heart and cannot feel. When she moves it is in wrath; when she pauses it is amid ruin. Her prayers are curses; her god is a demon, her communion is death, her vengeance is eternity, her Decalogue written in the blood of her victims, and if she stops for a moment in her infernal flight it is upon a kindred rock to whet her vulture fang for a more sanguinary desolation. " Daniel O' Connell 1775-1847 ,Irish National I leader.)

- 3) How can we find within ourselves the bedrock of faith, strength and virtue which might enable us to right the ship of state and steer a course based upon those original principles of Life Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.**

I'll address that final question by attempting to explain "**What it means for me to be an American.**"

To be an American is to be one of a multitude. Like many others, I am a hyphenated American. "E Pluribus Unum, (From many, one.) is the United States motto. It appears on our nation's coins and paper money, as well many of our public monuments. It was first used to unify the 13 British colonies in North America during the American Revolution (1775-1783), the phrase acquired new meaning when the United States received wave after wave of immigrants from many lands. There were Italian-Americans, Irish-Americans, German- Americans, and others. This is indeed a HypheNation. 😊

However, there is a difference between the hyphenation of those voluntary immigrants who came in search of the American dream and those referred to in the original draft of the Declaration of Independence which included the following:

"King George... waged a cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere...."

As a Native American and an African-American, seeing my ancestors presented through the prism of others' prejudices was not easy... The pain I felt when that beautiful little five year old girl hurled that hateful word at me lingered for a long time. However I learned that scars are only reminders of the fact that we are stronger than whatever it was that tried to hurt us.

It has now been over 50 years since Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. shared his Dream with our Nation from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

Dr. King found the words to express his Dream in such a way that it became our own. His words seemed to make time stand still and then, for a time, part the veil that divided us. His words soared and lifted us above the hate and fear and rancor. He found words that touched the hearts of men; words that motivated and inspired. He shared his Dream in such a way that we were lifted up to see beyond the jangling discord, and catch a glimpse of a world that could exist beyond the valley of despair in which the country seemed mired at that time. He found words that opened our minds to the possibilities and showed us a way that we could make that Dream a reality.

Today, Martin the man is gone, and we celebrate his Memory. Martin the man is gone, but his dream survives and his words still inspire.

Unfortunately, as much as his words may still inspire, far too often they fail to transform. There is a huge gap that exists between the Dream and the Reality. It is a gap as wide as the side a of a cruise ship that sails off to some exotic port and leaves a poor man on the dock to wonder if he has enough change to catch a bus back to the shelter. It is a gap as wide as the one that exists between the minimum wages paid, and the amount needed to pay the light bill, or avoid the eviction notice.

Between the Dream and the reality there is a gap as wide as a canyon, and it has been filled in with words that tap into the anger and stoke the fears that beset us. It is a gap that has been filled with excuses for failure, and reasons for hate. Between the Dream and the reality, there are red states and blue states and states of confusion and states of denial.

Between the Dream and the Reality there remain problems that may seem insurmountable and threaten to overwhelm us with their complexity. It is a gap as wide as the aisle that separates political parties and paralyzes a nation with its "us versus them rhetoric". A river fills that gap, a river that seems to carry away all hope in its raging current. Far too many of us remember the words that expressed the Dream, but have forgotten that it **too** was supposed to be a blueprint for progress and a roadmap for change.

Dr. King had a Dream, but now it's time for us to awaken.

During a dark night of our nations soul, Martin's Dream shed a light on the possibilities... what could be would not be easy to achieve, but what was could not continue. These too are times that try men's souls, but what is more foolish, the child afraid of the dark, or the man afraid of the light?

Dr. King had Dream, but now it's time for us to awaken. Now is not the time to take a timid step into the dark, but rather a giant leap of faith into the great light that Dr. King's Dream ignited.

It is time for us to hew out a stone of hope from that mountain of despair.
 It is time for us to transform those jangling discords into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.
 It is time for us learn how we can work together, to pray together, to struggle together.... That was his hope... that was his Dream.

It is time for us to imagine a life in which his Dream could become our reality.

Today, Martin the man is gone, but as we celebrate his memory, let his words not only inspire, but transform.

Doctor King had a Dream,
 Now it's time for us to awaken-
 If not us-Who?
 If not now- When?
 If not here Where?

Righteousness can still roll down like a mighty stream,
 Once we wake up, and remember his Dream.

That's what it means for me to be an American at this moment in America's great History....

It is a time filled with reasons for hate by some, and excuses for failure by others, but for me, it represents a chance to stand upon the shoulders of giants and glimpse the possibility of greatness that still lies within the reach of every man, woman and child in this country who dares to dream while standing on the promises of a mighty God.

"A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself from within. The essential cause of Rome's decline lay in her people, her morals, her class struggles, her failing trade, her bureaucratic despotism, her stifling taxes, her consuming wars... Rome was not destroyed by Christianity, any more than it was destroyed by barbarian invasion; it was an empty shell when Christianity arose to influence and invasion came." (Will and Ariel Durant 1885-1981 and 1898-1981 American historians)

"If you see what needs to be repaired and how to repair it, then you have found a piece of the world that God has left for you to complete. But if you only see what is wrong and how ugly it is, then it is yourself that needs repair." (Schneerson, M.M. Rabbi, *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth*, New York, The Chabad Organization.)

How can we find within ourselves the bedrock of faith, strength and virtue which might enable us to right the ship of state and steer a course based upon those original principles of Life Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.?

What can we do?

- A) The acknowledged Role of the Creator, which the founders looked upon as the " hand of God," and how it actually influenced, guided and governed them as they formed and adopted our new system of government.

Headline Views

As politicians bicker,
The stock markets ticker
Shows a flicker of fear,

And the Headline Views
Just disguise the News-
That the "Signs of the Times" are here.

What could people possibly be thinking,
Could their heads be buried in the sand-
Who say, "You're end of the boat is sinkinking"
Could it be they just don't understand?

Bear Sterns and Lehman Brothers
Showed a weakness in the system-
It won't be long til some others
Wonder how we could have missed them.

The tears that were shed for Lehman?
I guess people had forgotten-
Were not first shed by Free Men,
They built that fortune trading cotton.

Something wicked this way blows,
Storm clouds on the horizon-
The times of Jacobs troubles,
Should not be so surprising.

Now I'm not trying to rattle nerves,
I hope no one feels disrespected-
I just hope his poem somehow shows serves
To show that we're all connected.

You couldn't build prisons fast enough,
Nor throw up enough border fences-
Nor stop moral decline with a handcuff,
It's time we all came to our senses.

Banks are nervous, people are scared-
Who has time for a "War on Terror"?
It's time the Gospel Truth be declared,
We've had enough of human error.

What could people possibly be thinking?
Could their heads be buried in the sand?
Who say, ""Your end of the boat is sinking"
Could it be they just don't understand?

"That problem's up there in the hills" they say,
"We'll be safe down here in the Valley-"
Or, "Our streets are safe, above the fray,
The problems back there in the alley."

She said, "Health insurance covered my kids shots,
They simply scheduled vaccinations."
While in the restaurant washing pots
With hepatitis complications,

Is the guy who tossed her Chef Salad,
With his slightly trembling hands-
Because his green card was invalid,
He couldn't get checked for his swollen glands.

He said, "My kids go to private schools."
And he said it rather proudly-
The "drop out dealer" called him a fool,
And walked away laughing loudly.

His kids took his jewelry to the pawnshop,
When their allowance suddenly ran dry-
And thought they felt badly, they had to cop,
They couldn't face him if they weren't high.

You see-whatever happens on that mountaintop,
Will surely roll down in the valley-
And their safe streets"" will never stop,
The crimes born back there in the alley.

Now for those who choose to have Penthouse views-
I don't begrudge them, nor envy their plans-
It's the other part that breaks my heart,
The homeless eating out of garbage cans.

Well they've taken prayer out of the schools,
But there's no problem bringing in a "9"-
No more prayer, but plenty of fools,
Like the ones they had at Columbine.

So now we've chased the Taliban,
From the mountains of Afghanistan-
Across the border into Pakistan,
How long until we Bomb Iran!

People please! Come to your senses!
We need more than Border Fences-
All this intrigue and suspense is,
Just a part of our recompenses.

"The people shall labor in vain
And the high gates shall be burned with fire."
That's a fact that was made so plain,
Back in the Book of Jeremiah.

"They shall impoverish thy fenced cities,
Where in thou trusted with the sword."
Border patrols and vigilantes
Accomplish nothing without the Lord!

The front lines in the "War on Terror,"
Is in our hearts and in our minds-
To blame Islam would be an error,
Like squeezing fruit from the rinds.

The rinds are just the cover,
What's inside is the fruit-
You must dig deeper to discover
The basis for that bitter root.

It may seem like a mystery,
When in fact it's crystal clear-
Just take a look at history,
Man, a bomb can't stop an idea!

"Where do wars and fighting come from among you?"
Do they not spring from our own desires?
Or someone speaking another tongue,
Who has something the world requires?

As long as we continue to think,
That only our way of thinking is best-
It will always bring us to the brink
Of waving swords as if we were possessed.

The stock market tanked, the major banks,
And investment firms began to fail-
The President said, "They're sacrosanct!"
And got the taxpayers to "put up bail."

So taxpayers who couldn't pay their mortgages,
Paid to bail out investment banks-
While digging out of debt with "sand wedges,
And finding spare change to fill their tanks.

But now who would guard the guardians,
Who had their hands deep in our pocket-
The last stand of some "republicans"
Who took our futures just to "hock it."

They just patched it up and hoped it floated,
Then jumped the sinking ship like rats-
That way after the country voted,
They could blame it on the Democrats.

I'm not trying to be political,
Both sides leave much to be desired-
But when the situation is critical,
Wisdom and virtue is what's required.

I believe in the separation,
In theory, of the church from the state-
But we must seek reconciliation
We have to differentiate.

The "Word" says we must pray for our leaders,
I pray we get some we can trust-
That way we as interceders
Won't have to look away in disgust,

As their "policies" enrich their friends
While "WE THE PEOPLE" bear the burden-
And our "means" justify their ends"
Before "We" can even get a word in.

Our sons fought and died on foreign soil,
As the victims of a great deception-
Turns out it was all about the oil,
Just sleight of hand and misdirection.

Some leaders think of the next election,
True statesmen the next generation-
Who will lead us in the right direction?
Do what's right for the good of the Nation?

The word "Man" is the root of mankind,
But what kind of man would have expected-
That all our roots were not intertwined,
Overlapping and intersected.

We tend to take things for granted,
As if we're living in a shell-
And our views can tend to get slanted,
Proudly our chests begin to swell.

"That problems an ocean away we say",
"Let those people find their own solution"
And then a wave starts to head our way,
That we can't stop with the constitution.

Just as ripples reach for distant shores,
And just a spark can start a raging fire-
Those problems won't stay behind closed doors,
They'll reach out and drag us into the mire.

And just as a rising tide can lift all boats,
A storm surge can sweep them all away-
Both yachts and dinghies can become footnotes,
About vessels floating in the bay.

Open the eyes of your understanding,
Before you're hit with the unexpected-
And find they were not all alone on quicksand,
And that yes, we were all connected.

Yes, the word "man" is the root of mankind
But it might have been a far better thing-
If we thought of that "root "as being kind,
Perhaps it would cause an awakening.

If we saw ourselves in a different light,
Let's say, as a brotherhood of man-
And we were ALL as children in His sight,
We could get down with the Master's plan.

We must start with ourselves, as a **Nation**,
Begin to find our strength within-
We need spiritual rejuvenation,
Turn back to God and flee from sin.

2nd Chronicles makes it very clear,
Obedience brings on God's Blessing-
But all those Blessings quickly disappear,
When we turn our backs and start digressing.

Deuteronomy 28:2

Contains a very revealing verse-

As we face this Nation's mounting debt,
We need that Blessing and not this curse.

If we "harken not" to the voice of God,
Our fields, stores, bodies and flocks-
Will fall under His wrath and His rod,
And our stocks will fall faster than rocks.

"If my people who are called by my name,
Shall humble themselves seek my face and pray..."
If we don't – we'll have ourselves to blame,
For the misfortune that's heading our way.

We call ourselves "One Nation Under God,"
Yet we stand divided by our sin-
In a place where the grapes of wrath are trod,
Can we expect healing to begin?

Will He "hear from Heaven" and heal our land
If we just try to do it on our own?
I pray to God that we may understand,
We need the blessings that flow from His throne.

It's time the Gospel Truth be declared,
We've had enough of human error-
And if it's not too late, we may be spared,
His Divine Wrath and our mortal terror.

for
B) The need of virtuous and moral leaders.

As we approach yet another election cycle, it has become ever more apparent that the United States of America seems to have devolved into a dysfunctional and bitterly divided Nation rather than the "United" States of America that the Founding Fathers had envisioned.

In the book Democracy in America by Alexis De Tocqueville, one of his most famous passages, according to Skousen p. 83, was:

"I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers, but it was not there; in her fertile fields and boundless prairies, and it was not there; in her rich mines and her vast world of commerce, and it was not there. Not until I went to the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and her power. America is great because she is good, and if America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

As we approach an election cycle for the year 2016, it has become evident that one of the principles of the Founding Fathers has been severely compromised. "The most promising method of securing a virtuous and morally stable people is to elect virtuous leaders."(Skousen p.59)

Voters, it has been said, are better at signifying their dissatisfaction than they are about thinking cleverly about solutions. In fact, many people who claim to be thinking may be only rearranging their prejudices to fit the philosophies of their favorite talk show hosts or political pundits. A **Savage Nation** in a **Rush** to play their **Trump** cards as they heed the **Beck** and call of **Republicrats** and **Democratans**.

At More than a Billion Dollars for the race to the White House, one thing is certain; we will definitely have the best politician that money can buy. 😊

C) The paramount importance of an educated electorate

Raising the Bar

One of the biggest battles that this nation will face in the 21st Century will not be fought in the trenches of some far off land. The front lines will not be manned by our military elite, and casualties will not be carried off in flag draped coffins.

The frontlines will be in the classrooms, and the trenches will be filled with underpaid and overburdened teachers. The casualties may well be measured in shattered lives and illusions; measured in broken dreams and promises. Those casualties will swell the ranks of a prison population that has already earned us the dubious distinction of having the highest per capita inmate population in the world.

Although we make up only 5% of the world's population, we have over 25% of its inmates- That distinction reveals troublesome symptoms, but at the root of the problem lays an educational system that once served as an entrée to the American dream and now delivers a steady stream of our citizens into confinement.

As passions flare in Town Hall meetings all across these divided states of America, and debates can erupt at the drop of a hat, a silent scream reverberates throughout our educational system- Though silent for now, its echo will not just be heard, but felt for generations to come. That scream will bounce off of prison walls, and echo through the chambers of legislatures which will wrestle with the the rising costs of prisons, and its crippling effect upon state budgets.

How can we expect to maintain our values when our priorities have been misplaced? Where is the outrage? Where is the passion? Where is the debate?

From the very beginning, our Government has been called upon to “build the infrastructure, train the workforce and lay the foundation for our economic growth.

Thomas Jefferson championed the creation of a government funded University System that would educate and train talent across the Nation- Of all of his accomplishments, he considered the University of Virginia to be one of his greatest.

In the midst of a civil war which threatened to tear this nation apart, Abraham Lincoln saw fit to sign the “Morrill Act “in 1862, which created a system of Land Grant Colleges- Institutions of higher learning which would lay the foundations for which that war was being fought, a prosperous and **United States** of America. He knew which battles were worth fighting. He also knew, not only that a “House divided” would not stand, but that an uneducated one would not stand for long.

Today, we have one of the highest dropout rates in the industrialized world! Half of our 9yr. olds cannot perform basic multiplication or division. Half of our teens cannot understand basic fractions or even spell the word logarithm,” never mind describe its function. Only 22% of those who do manage to graduate from High School are prepared to take college level courses in English, science and mathematics.... Ironically, we now have a “house” which can’t divide.

According to an essay by Nancy Gibb “Time Will Tell,” in the Sept. 21st, 09 Issue of TIME MAGAZINE, “...a head spinning viral video, ‘Did You Know?’ informs us that the top 10 jobs in 2010 did not exist 10 yrs. Ago, so we’re preparing kids for jobs that don’t yet exist, using technology we haven’t even invented yet.”

How can we, in good conscience, burden a generation with what is shaping up to be one of the greatest national debts in the history of civilization, without preparing them for those “head spinning” challenges of tomorrow?

The first shots of the battle have been fired with silencers. Wasted minds are beginning to mount. The muted cries of a “...child left behind” grows into a chorus- The silent scream is beginning to echo off of prison walls. When will we hear it? When will we care? More importantly, when will we act?

Any military commander facing a battle would begin by looking at the demographics of the battlefield. If the classrooms of America were viewed as the arena, what would the field of battle look like?

- 46 million students attend over 87,000 schools in 14,471 school districts across the nation. (Based upon 2009 figures)
- 6.2 million of those students have English as a second language. (Many speak no English at all.)
- 6 million students have disabilities
- 1 in 5 live with single mom’s how themselves did not finish highschool.
- 1 in 5 may have suffered some form of child abuse.
- 1 in 8 will be hungry. (For many, the school lunch may be the only meal of the day.)
- 2 million are physically abused or neglected.
- 2 million are “latch key kids” how come home to an empty house.

- 500,000 will be from foster homes and other institutions.
- 500,000 will be homeless.
- 400,000 are "crack" babies.
- 1.2 million will drop out of school each year.
- **High school dropouts are 8 times more likely to wind up in prison at some point in their lives.**

So much for the Battlefield

What of the teachers who will fill the trenches?

- 3 million teachers face those tremendous challenges on a daily basis.
- Half of them have masters degrees.
- One third of them will quit within the first 10 years because of the negative atmosphere, political finger pointing and "burn out."
- Counting hours worked, the average teacher does in 9 months what it takes "40 Hour workers" 11.5 months to do.
- The average teacher spends over \$400 a year in personal funds on badly needed supplies.
- Most states have a last hired first fired policy which almost ensures that enthusiastic new teachers will become discouraged.
- Underpaid and overburdened, they are the unsung heroes in an undeclared war.

What of the casualties?

They will not be flown into Dover Air Force base amid military honors, but bused into correctional Institutions surrounded by razor wire. They may become a part of America's Industrial Prison Complex, one of the fastest growing segments of our society. If in Florida whereas over \$7,800 had been expended for their "Education," over \$26,000 will be expended for their Incarceration. If in California, that figure will be over \$50,000 per year, per inmate! Where once their voices didn't count, they will learn to "sit up for count" 7 times a day.

Our children can't vote, campaign, or hire paid lobbyists; they can only trust us to do the right thing.

75% of America's 2.2 million inmates are high school drops! 95% of them will eventually be released. (At the current rate of about 650,000 per year.) With no diploma, and a felony conviction, they will likely face a future that revolves around poverty, crime and recidivism.

It's been determined that the 1.2 million drop outs from "07" alone will cost the Nation \$369 Billion in "lost Productivity" during their lifetimes. (That's based upon lower wages, unemployment, etc.) However, that figure does not take into account the possible costs of incarceration, subsidized healthcare, public assistance, or the accumulated costs to society of poverty driven crimes of opportunity.

Since "2007" those figures were released, over 13 million students have dropped out of school!

The price that society may have to pay in "Lost productivity", crime, prison costs, subsidized healthcare, and public assistance will be staggering, and potentially catastrophic.

Students in the 50's were told that in the event of a Soviet Nuclear Attack, they would be safe if they got beneath their desks and sat very still. They entered the 21st Century being told there would be "No Child Left Behind." That was followed by a "Race to the Top." But for those who fell through the cracks they would find a safety net made of steel bars and razor wire.

The vision that made this Nation great, must not be blurred by those who would bail out bankers with M.B.A.'s, and yet balk at reinforcing one of the principle things that made this Nation great. Our future, and that of our children, must not be sacrificed upon an altar of greed, nor left to wither at the roots from neglect.

The values that made this Nation Great must not be cast aside. The strength that earned this Nation respect, must not be displayed only through our use of force, but also through our determination to ensure that all of our children are provided with the opportunity to reach the top. If they are to be limited, let it be by their own abilities and not the narrowness of our expectation.

The fruit of our labors and the best of all our dreams must be sown into the minds of those who will someday carry the burden of our monumental National Debt! If they are to face that debt tomorrow, then we must meet our obligation today.

It's been said that the fall of every great society begins with the neglect of its people. Well, let us not neglect the tools that our children will need to "Stand and Deliver," or surely they will have to learn how to "sit up for count."

During the Korean War, a General was questioned about his decision to retreat when his men were losing a battle. His response was, "We're not retreating, we're advancing in another direction." ☺ Let us resolve to acknowledge the battle that lies ahead, and to advance in the right direction. It's not just our future that's at stake, but the future of this great Nation! And if we're not **Raising the Bar**, then we're dropping the ball.

As this sentence comes to an end, it will begin a new chapter in my life, and I still believe in happy endings. As I approach that next chapter with a view towards rebuilding my life and successfully re-entering society, I can't help but consider how important this opportunity has been to take part in this F.A.U. Civics Course, and really think about what it means to be an American in view of my **past, present and future.**

Life, unfortunately, does not come with a rewind button. We can't go back and do things differently while hoping for better results. Nor does it come with fast forward.... so we can't speed past the consequences of may have been poor choices or negative behaviors. But we can pause. We can pause and consider the fact that although we are where we are because of decisions we've made in the past, we can ask ourselves, "What kind of things can I do today which will make for a better tomorrow?"

We can't **control** our destiny. We can't control what will be happening 10, 15 or 20 years from now. We can only control ourselves; and that, one act at a time. But each "Act" becomes a brick, and it is with those bricks we will lay the path that leads to that destiny. Yes, each "Act" becomes a brick, and it is with those bricks that we will lay the foundation upon which our lives will either rise or fall.

36 years ago, while a student at Columbia University, I had dinner at a restaurant called Windows on the World atop 1 World Trade Center Tower. The view that was laid out before me seemed as magnificent as what I envisioned my future to be....

As it turned out, I'd grown up right across the Hudson River from the W.T.C. – It seemed as if I'd, literally, grown up right alongside of those Towers. I'd watched over the years the years as floors were added to those Towers just as "stories" were being added to my life. It was when they were completed in 1974 that I went away to that New England Prep School and had the encounter with that beautiful little girl who had caused me such pain, without even knowing that her words carried such a sting.

Over the course of the next thirty years, I had a big old slice of the American Dream. The "little boy from the hood" had broadened his horizons and spent time living in Europe, North Africa and many other "exciting" ports of call.

Not too long after the Towers fell on September 11, 2001, I went from a 2 ½ acre ranch in with horses, to a 2 man cell in a "Gated Community" of a different kind. My fall seemed just as sudden and devastating as those of the towers.

Today, The freedom Tower has risen from the ashes of what was once referred to as "Ground Zero."

During the past 12 years of my incarceration, I've been blessed to have earned a Graduate of theology and Bachelors of Biblical Studies. I am in the process of completing a Masters in Biblical Studies and a Masters in Theology from two different Florida Bible Colleges. If it may be God's will, then for His Glory, I hope to begin work on a doctorate in Theology in the not too distant future.

I might have entered the Criminal justice System as mate # M05398, but I hope to leave here as Dr. Field. ☺ They have an expression in Prison, "It is what it is." That may be true, but "It will be what I make it!"

The most important thing that I've learned during the past dozen years is this: It is not my location in Prison, but my position in Christ that will make all the difference in my life. Although I may look forward to the possibility of celebrating my release with a dinner atop the new Freedom Towers, I will continue to live my life with God's word as a Lamp unto my feet, (to show me where I stand) and as a light unto my path, saying this is the Way, walk ye in it!) Ref. Psalm 119:105

I'll close with this thought: I consider 2nd Chronicles 7:14 to be an appropriate way to end this essay on ***What it Means to be an American***. It is a verse that applies to my life as an individual, as well as that of what we call our **One Nation Under God**. "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven, and I will heal their land."

www.betweenthebays.org/blogs/1398