



RESCUE

OUR BEST AMERICA IS ONLY
ONE GENERATION AWAY

AMERICA

CHRIS SALAMONE
AND PROFESSOR GILBERT MORRIS

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS vii

Part I: THEN: The Dawn of a Dynasty

CHAPTER 1 The Inheritance We Died For 5

CHAPTER 2 The Standard We Stood For 15

CHAPTER 3 The Future We Fought For 31

Part II: NOW: America in Decline

CHAPTER 4 The Paradox of Prosperity 51

CHAPTER 5 The Attitude of Entitlement and the Culture of Complaint 61

CHAPTER 6 Redistribution and the Political Entitlement Apparatus 83

CHAPTER 7 Debt, Deficits, and Global Weakness 95

CHAPTER 8 The Broad Effects of the Decline of Education 115

Part III: HOW: What Americans Can Do for America

CHAPTER 9 Personal Responsibility 131

CHAPTER 10 National Service 145

CHAPTER 11 Raising the Next Great(ful) Generation 163

CHAPTER 12 The Power of One 183

ENDNOTES 189

INDEX 193

ABOUT THE AUTHORS 205

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PART I

Then:
The Dawn *of a* Dynasty

THE DAWN OF A DYNASTY

“Consider your origin: you were not born to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge,” wrote the eminent Italian poet Dante Alighieri. It was counsel given during a time, the late Middle Ages, when one’s origin was not an uncommon consideration. Much of Europe, including Dante’s Italy, was in political and spiritual crisis following the Crusades and had yet to find its footing during the Renaissance, for which his hometown of Florence would become best known. Dante’s counsel from his famous *Divine Comedy* was certainly timely, even prophetic, given the state of his country at that time. His homeland needed to—and would, shortly after his death in 1321—return to its spiritual, classical roots.

Dante’s words were also timeless. They point to a transcendent truth: that all collective progress is merely an outcrop of individual progress. For any group of people—especially one as large as a country—to recover from any crisis, its citizens need to return to the foundational virtues and knowledge that establish all enduring human institutions.

It is now no coincidence that the national heritage of the man known as the “father of the Italian language” and “the Supreme Poet” includes preeminence in two global institutions: family and the arts. While Italians are known for many interests, foremost among them are a deep love and respect of family and a deep appreciation of the arts. As the great-grandson of Italian immigrants, I am a beneficiary of both. And, as an American citizen, I am also blessed to be the beneficiary of another heritage—one that was established less than three hundred years ago yet has bettered more lives and improved more economies than any national heritage in history.

It is therefore of great interest to me—an Italian-American heir—that my American heritage is facing a spiritual, political crisis not dissimilar to that in Dante’s fourteenth-century Italy. The advice he gave then is thus fitting for America, and Americans, today.

We must consider our origin so that we can once again follow our foundational virtue and knowledge. It is the way America became a great nation and the way Americans were meant to live.



My great grandparents, Antonio and Lucia Salamone, in New Jersey in the early 1950's with family members including my father (second from left).

LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE U. S. IMMIGRATION OFFICER AT PORT OF ARRIVAL.

Required by the regulations of the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, under Act of Congress approved March 3, 1903, to be delivered to the U. S. Immigration Officer by the Commanding Officer of any vessel having such passengers on board upon arrival at a port in the United States.

S. S. *S. S. NAPOLI* sailing from *PALERMO* on *26 AUGUST* 1903. Arriving at Port of *New York* July 9, 1903.

No.	Name	Age	Sex	Rank	Profession	Marital Status	Place of Birth	Country of Birth	Religion	Education	Occupation	Address	Remarks
1	<i>Antonio Salamone</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Head of Family</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Palermo</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Catholic</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>100 West 12th St New York</i>	<i>Admission granted</i>
2	<i>Lucia Salamone</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Palermo</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Catholic</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>100 West 12th St New York</i>	<i>Admission granted</i>
3	<i>Antonio Salamone</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>Palermo</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Catholic</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>100 West 12th St New York</i>	<i>Admission granted</i>
4	<i>Lucia Salamone</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>Palermo</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Catholic</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>100 West 12th St New York</i>	<i>Admission granted</i>
5	<i>Antonio Salamone</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>Palermo</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Catholic</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>100 West 12th St New York</i>	<i>Admission granted</i>

This ship's manifest lists my great grandparents and their three children as alien passengers, arriving at Ellis Island in 1903.

1

THE INHERITANCE WE DIED FOR

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free.

—RONALD REAGAN

Former President Reagan's weighty words reflect one side of the coin of our future. It is true that the cornerstone of our country—freedom—is always only one generation from extinction. And yet the other side of the coin is also true: America is only one generation from its greatest days.

What will make the difference?

Listening to today's predominant discourse will tell you that overhauled health care or free market solutions or reduced government spending will tip the scale. There are many theories about which matters most and many more theories about what the remedies must entail. Yet while these opportune topics must always be discussed, they should never steer the conversation. Such topics tend to focus resources on only the surface needs of some Americans without considering the substantive needs of every American. Our substantive needs are largely intangible, and intangibles are, unfortunately, easy to overlook.

However, the intangibles are topics we must never forget. They, and not the prevailing pundit drift, should dominate our discourse now and into the future. We need to remind ourselves of a time when this country's only ingredients were the gratitude, personal responsibility, and ongoing sacrifice of men and women who had taken great and sometimes grave risks for three very simple yet profound ideals: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Our country's origin is defined by the characteristics of men and women who left their homes and livelihoods, the familiarity of their friends and the comforts of their native cultures, to pursue the promise of something better than the world had ever known. They were Europeans mostly, and among them members of my own family. My great-grandparents left everything they knew in Cerda, Sicily, to embark on a passenger boat for America with only the clothes on their backs and twenty dollars to their name. They were certainly not alone in their journey. Many others made the dangerous voyage too—at some point, members from most of our families did. I often wonder what filled their thoughts and what their conversations were like. One thing I know is that what dominated the discourse of their day should still dominate our discourse today, because theirs were not only the topics that unified the first Americans—they are the topics that drove the dawning of the American dynasty, one which, despite differences and disagreements, compelled us to care for one another and fight for one another.

Isn't this the America you believe in?

Isn't this the heritage you hope to leave to your children and grandchildren?

We are a country, yes. But we are more than that—like a family, we are bound together by a history and a heritage that includes a set of ideals, values, and principles that make us who we are and show us who we can become. To be certain, members of our country, like members of a family, don't always see eye to eye. But families remain together when their hearts remain united by their core principles, values, and standards. Such unity should be the driving force today, because Reagan is right—America's inheritance never was or will be passed down in the bloodstream. Yet it must be passed down, somehow, if we are to remain united like no other country in the world.

How that must happen is what this book is all about.

Do you believe the founding values of the United States of America are permanent and, to quote Shakespeare, “an ever-fixed mark [t]hat looks on tempests and is never shaken”?

This is the question at the root of the great and confusing complex of issues with which our nation is currently grappling. We can all agree that the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the principles codified in them are the basis upon which this nation was founded. But should we stretch or alter our values in order to meet the challenges of our time or the prevailing cultural expectations?

America was founded—as John Adams said—on “the most stupendous articles” ever laid before a parliament of men. Those articles were based on the first principles of the rights of man and were so resilient and redeeming that even the most cynical examination of American history reflects a constant march toward a “more perfect union” by means of constant correction of wrongs.

Those founding values were responsible over time for the rise of an American dynasty that has been—though not without its mistakes—a constant force for good in the world, extending the benefits of liberty and prosperity to the largest number of people at any time in human history. America was made great through its founding values and exercised its greatness more in its generosity than in conquest or imposition.

But now America faces headwinds of ruthless partisanship, imperial overreach, and economic implosion.

Who among us—at least those who are honest and not blinded by aimless nationalism—would not admit that our nation has lost its way? Who will deny that the values that gave us the humane living we enjoy seem to have been forgotten? If our Founding Fathers could observe us today would gratitude, personal responsibility, and a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of national prosperity be evident? Who does not feel the threatening hand of fate and the collapsing favor of fortune warning us that if we are to survive and thrive as a nation we must return to what made us what we are? And who does not fear that things have run so far away from those values, that a system of corruption has now emerged in which our citizens and elected officials demonize rather than disagree, compromise rather than cooperate, and react rather than respond?

Our nation stands at a crossroads: Either we will recognize the forces that are pulling us farther and farther apart, and make the difficult choices and sacrifices necessary to rescue America, or we will lose the world’s last great hope for humanity.

The solutions required will not be agreed upon easily or take effect immediately, but the urgency of our situation requires a radical refocusing on what has always been essential in the making of America. Make no mistake—we are in a fight for our survival. If we do not commit ourselves to rescue America, she will surely perish.

The problem with the current debate over what ails our nation is that it places effects in the position of causes. Those forces put forth as primary causes of our decline are actually large systems of effects driven within our political culture, effects that are so obvious, so tangible, that we come to regard them as more fundamental than they are.

There is no doubt, for instance, that departure from prudence in international affairs, resulting in expensive misadventures abroad over the last hundred years, is certainly a force in the nation's present state of affairs. Government spending has run amok, with successive administrations and Congress passing pork-laden legislation, each party with its own pet projects adding to our national financial burdens, and neither side having the credibility to speak for the prudence that was once the hallmark of American fiscal management. Who can doubt that our present economic woes owe as much to the orgiastic greed exhibited on Wall Street as to a dereliction of duty in Washington and to imprudence in the population in general?

Still others say the cause of our decline is the societal malaise, excesses, and debauchery of a people grown fat—literally—on profligate government entitlements.

Finally, there are those who argue that our decline is being authored by combinations of these factors, resulting in the decimation of our sense of national community, the disintegration of the family unit, and the decline of America. While this comes closest to the truth, the true cause of our problems is that we no longer create citizens who understand and embrace the core values that made this nation “the United States of America.”

A zero sum game has been created in which the larger questions of the needs and health of the nation are overrun by those who routinely absolve themselves of personal responsibility, seeking immediate satisfaction and making demands on the nation that are inconsistent with its foundational values. As such, the causes for decline lie in the psychological evisceration of the ideals and practice of gratitude, personal responsibility, and sacrifice upon which the first Americans came together.

Our first duty, then, is to produce the kind of citizen capable of sustaining this nation's great heritage. We must produce this level of citizenship in ourselves and in those around us. We must cultivate citizens who understand what it means to "be American" and who instill in each subsequent generation, and in those immigrants we welcome to our shores, a culture that embraces and upholds a lifestyle of gratitude, personal responsibility, and sacrifice—a citizenry who feel a burning sense of gratitude for the opportunities provided by a nation built on the efforts and sacrifices of those who came before them; who take responsibility for themselves and for all the outcomes of their lives; and who are willing and determined to make further sacrifices to both seize the opportunities America offers and to perpetuate America's greatness.

It is true that at the very moment our Founding Fathers were announcing the values of such citizenry, the nation was committing atrocities (such as slavery) that violated the values themselves. Yet that fact does not make these values any less legitimate and worthy. We must simply look to the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States for guidance: "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union . . ." This means, among other things, that the people of America are—or should be—constantly perfecting this nation by admitting wrongs, correcting injustices, and making a sustained effort to protect, uphold, and solidify its foundation.

Consider the parents and grandparents of what Tom Brokaw has labeled the "Greatest Generation." Before 1900, these predecessors of America's Greatest Generation consisted primarily of generations of immigrants, mostly from Europe, who came to this country at great risk and embraced and adopted America's founding values. These would-be citizens didn't board 747s, sipping mimosas en route and landing seven hours later at JFK airport. They left their homes, the lands they knew, their neighbors and friends, and often their family—all the unspoken intimacies, certainties, and sinews of their histories—and traveled weeks, sometimes months, across the Atlantic knowing they might not ever reach the land of their dreams.

Why would they risk everything? It had to be for something truly extraordinary.

They came because of the appeal of the American Experiment, the draw of American values, the promise of a more perfect union. And when they landed, first and foremost among their instincts was a sincere feeling of gratitude—gratitude for the privilege of being in America and gratitude for

the sacrifices made by so many to create this nation. They were motivated by a duty to work hard, to take responsibility for the outcomes of their lives (good or bad). And they were compelled to make further sacrifices as they embraced the opportunities America provided. The men and women of the Greatest Generation were heirs to this legacy.

Such heirs seem missing today. Has the legacy been damaged?

Yes. But not beyond repair. Still, that repair begins with you and me.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is one who understood this. His deep philosophical insight into American values as our great moral teacher was inspiring. He believed so profoundly in those values that his life was spent advocating—and was even sacrificed—for the sort of change that moved us ever closer to a more perfect embodiment of them. With a magisterial eloquence—matched in our history, in my view, only by Abraham Lincoln—King prophesied, “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’”

This creed was for him, as it should be for all Americans, “an ever-fixed mark.” Our rescue lies in a committed march toward a more perfect embodiment of the values that uphold such foundational creeds.

Citizens of most nations speak of a faith in their country. But given that America was initiated and built on values, it is much more appropriate to speak of a faith in “American values.” At a clear and decisive point, the values by which we consented to live were established, and they were sufficiently broad and deep to allow us to grow as a nation. Those values—life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness—have produced such high levels of protection and prosperity that we honor those who have given the “last full measure of devotion”—ultimate sacrifices of life, liberty, and happiness—for them. We commemorate them because they demonstrate for us that it is possible to have faith in those values in an absolute way, beyond faith in the country itself.

To emphasize the difficulty and the quiet but stupendous majesty of this faith, I can say that it rests upon something all lovers of liberty feel instinctively: Justice, while often delayed, is not ultimately justice denied. Or as Dr. King once said: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” This is the same faith those like Frederick Douglass continued to hold despite being denied the benefits of liberty—whether because of racism, ideology, or

expediency. These faithful did not define America or the strength of its values by that denial or delay. They believed the values upon which America was founded were larger, more powerful, and more evocative than the moment of their suffering. They believed justice would one day come.

Under and because of this faith, we have endured what no logic could convince us to endure. We hold fast, knowing these founding values make it possible for the greatest number of human beings to become their best selves, to experience life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

1. I believe in American exceptionalism.
2. I believe in America, in the values upon which America was founded, and what it stands for. As I have seen the sacrifices made by the relative few, on behalf of so many, and as I have experienced firsthand great successes and painful failures, I have come to better understand the true magic and majesty of this great young nation. And through the good times and the bad, I have found honor and reward in simply entering the arena this nation provides, playing in this game of life and giving it my all. Here, as nowhere else, I can move with a resolve in the areas of my own interest, without fear that I will be in any other way impeded by law and without fear that what I reap from my own efforts will be taken from me.
3. I believe in America's founding values and the ethic upon which this nation was formed. I believe in an America that embodies and embraces a spirit of freedom, personal responsibility, and success through sacrifice. I am made humble by the sacrifices of many, including those in my own family, and I recommit myself to the ideals of this great country. Every day I am driven by my gratitude for the price that has been paid for the freedoms we all enjoy as American citizens.
4. I believe in an America that reconceived the notion of what it means to be a human being and a citizen. This nation gave meaning to the rule of law and has—in its short life—paid every price, borne every burden, and sacrificed its blood and treasure to give hope, freedom, and prosperity to nations around the world. America's generosity has brought means and hope to the darkest corners of the globe.

5. I believe in an America whose middle class enjoys a prosperity that far exceeds and outpaces that of all the nations of Western Europe combined. I believe in a nation that has produced the greatest wealth the world has ever known.
6. I believe in an America in which an immigrant with an eighth-grade education, who leaves his native land in search of opportunity, can make a successful and honorable life for himself and his family. I believe in a country that embraced and empowered my great-grandparents the moment they set foot on Ellis Island.
7. I believe in an America that has, along the way, made many mistakes and at times meted out injustices, and yet, in pursuit of a “more perfect union,” still strives to uphold its founding values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and to embody gratitude, personal responsibility, and sacrifice so that today, more than yesterday, people are truly—and increasingly—equal and free.

I fear that America has become not at all what the Founding Fathers had imagined. And if they were to arise as Rip van Winkle did, would they find favor and take pride in what had become of their blessed Experiment? Would they regard us as good stewards of the profound American Paradigm they and many others—even our sons and daughters, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and grandfathers—fought and died to uphold? Would they believe the trials and tribulations had not been in vain?

It is time for each American to contribute again to the great American Experiment, to practice advanced citizenship, to move our country closer to a more perfect union. These activities are, after all, more than mere answers to a history exam. They are the air we, as American heirs, breathe.

To that end this book will explore what made America the “last best hope of earth,” as Abraham Lincoln put it; when and why we declined from that position; and how we can rescue America from its current path and restore it to its greatness.

Rediscover the significance of our founding values through these pages, examine honestly your role in our great nation’s decline, and be inspired to take part in its salvation. We have inherited much as Americans. In return, we should ensure that this inheritance continues.

Despite the litany of concerns, all is not lost for America. Charles Krauthammer, in his column for the *Weekly Standard*, said it best: “For America today, decline is not a condition. Decline is a choice.”

What will we choose?

2

THE STANDARD WE STOOD FOR

The historic glory of America lies in the fact that it is the one nation that was founded like a church. That is, it was founded on a faith that was not merely summed up after it had existed; it was defined before it existed.

—G. K. CHESTERTON

America's great standard of equality, inalienable rights, and life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is the most profound and deliberate upon which any nation in human history was established. There is no greater or more perfect embodiment of this standard than human freedom. There are no rights greater than those endowed by our Creator. The power of the American Experiment is this: Every American is able to imagine any triumph and to bear any challenge because we are free. And because the nation was founded on such freedom, the living history of America is embodied in its constant and advancing manifestation of the values that support and protect it.

In fact, without such values, America is not possible. Without them, Americans have no basis for becoming a unified nation of people. We are but a cacophony of indecipherable voices claiming, demanding, and distorting the benefits of America without ever acting or sacrificing to maintain or advance them. Without them, the ideal captured in the Latin phrase *e pluri-bus unum*—out of many, one—would be unattainable.

In learning how to sustain our faith in what America stood for from the beginning, we must first understand the core values themselves and the principles with which they are enacted. We must develop a deep and flourishing awareness of the attractive power of the dawning American dynasty to act upon the imaginations of those who sought refuge on our shores, who validated the American Experiment not merely by their arrival here but by living out the American Dream.

AMERICA IS EXCEPTIONAL

Though it had its “birthing pains,” America attempted to make an immediate and absolute commitment to human freedom from the moment of its conception. American values did not come into being by accident; they were the result of what is perhaps the most profound research experiment conducted by men concerned with the founding of a new citizenry. Ideals and models of government were imagined, proposed, and discarded. From other national experiments, philosophers, and kingdoms of old, the Founding Fathers extracted the best features and added them to a new structure and method that matured into an American Paradigm. It was the first, most deliberate establishment of a commonwealth of citizens in human history.

By comparison, the European political experience, in its march toward the liberty of mankind, was in constant tension with the imperial power of monarchy, which was supported by the authority of the Christian Church. Neither kings nor clergy had an interest in a government by, of, or for the people. The rise of liberty in Europe thus did not have a specific point at which all European nations accepted or adhered to the notion of human freedom. Nations moved incrementally toward liberty and democracy over centuries. Each new principle was advanced through confrontation, as with the challenging of the monarch’s authority through the Magna Carta in 1215 and the Cromwellian revolt from 1642 to 1649. Each victory inched Europe closer and closer to democratic forms of government.

While Europe gave us language, certain cultural influences, and a host of unnameable features of nationhood and society, in matters of liberty and equality, America was deliberate and specific and is—in fact—exceptional in human history. There has never been a national paradigm like that established in 1776.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

The Declaration of Independence was the catalyst that ignited a new American spirit, one that laid a foundation for the freedom and enterprise that led America to its prominence. The Declaration itself was, in profound respects, a letter to King George III informing him of the will and character of the new “American” peoples and the civic values that motivated their separation from him and his kingdom.

These principles would have seemed bizarre to most European sovereigns at that time in history. The only inalienable rights endowed by the Creator that they recognized were their own. Yet Thomas Jefferson, the primary author of the Declaration, was not the first promoter of such ideas. Most of the scholarly literature points to English philosophers as the main influence on Jefferson’s thinking, but research reveals that he was also much influenced by French eighteenth-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose commitment to the wisdom of citizens, called the “general will,” is consistent with Jefferson’s belief in government by the many rather than the few. Jefferson was likewise swayed by the thinkers of the English Enlightenment (principally John Locke and, to a lesser degree, Immanuel Kant), and more discreetly by Richard Cumberland, a philosopher of natural law, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the true genius of continental philosophy and mathematics, whose logic seduced Jefferson.

What is not as well known is Jefferson’s indebtedness to the Scottish Enlightenment, particularly Adam Smith’s principles in *An Inquiry into the Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. That work was drawn both from Smith’s own *Theory of the Moral Sentiments and Jurisprudence* and Thomas Reid’s ideas in *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*. The Scots occupied an interesting position as a European people who had experienced subjugation and who possessed a Calvinistic “hard-headedness” and practicality that led to clear, unembellished principles. Commenting on Smith in a letter, Jefferson wrote, “In political economy I think Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* the best book extant.”¹ And in 1816 in a commentary on the *Treatise on Political Economy* by Destutt de Tracy, Jefferson wrote, “Adam Smith, first in England, published a rational and systematic work on Political economy, adopting generally the ground of the Economists, but differing on the subjects before specified. The system being novel, much argument and detail

seemed then necessary to establish principles which now are assented to as soon as proposed.”²

In fact, the following arguments in Smith’s work underscore the core thesis in the Declaration of Independence:

The natural effort of every individual to better his own condition, when suffered to exert itself with freedom and security, is so powerful a principle, that it is alone, and without any assistance, not only capable of carrying on the society to wealth and prosperity, but of surmounting a hundred impertinent obstructions with which the folly of human laws too often encumbers its operations.³

Smith advocated government by, of, and for the people. That is, people

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—Adam Smith

who live in comfort and assurance of a government that protects these rights as its first duty, and who are then inspired to industry to advance their own interests and, as a result, the interests of their communities and their nation.

This is the underlying concept of the American Paradigm.

The Declaration was and is foundational, and reform that pulls us from the values within it is an attempt to turn America into something it is not and cannot be. The best way to understand this is to explore the values themselves.

SELF-EVIDENT TRUTHS

Imagine that a man says to you, “I am an uncle.” Without knowing anything more, you could say with certainty that the man must have two of four relatives: a sister or a brother and a niece or a nephew. It cannot be doubted, cannot be disputed, and has no need of further explanation.

That is the nature of the “truths” laid out in the Declaration of Independence: They cannot be doubted, and to dispute them is to assault the self-evident truths of common sense.

What are those truths?

- a. “That all men are created equal”
- b. “That they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights”
- c. “That among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”

It is self-evident, wrote Jefferson, that all men are equal because God gave each individual an equal capacity for choice. This capacity for choice is the basis for our freedom and rights. (The distinction between the “capacity for choice” and the “freedom to choose” is described further in the subsections “Equality of Capacity” and “Equality Before the Law” later in this chapter.)

And these rights are inalienable. Not only can they not be taken away from the individual by a monarch or a politician or another human being, but individuals themselves cannot surrender or give them away. These rights include the right to life, to be free, and to pursue one’s own happiness.

The Ideal of Equality in America

In the most famous phrase in the Declaration of Independence—“All men are created equal”—the technical term “equality” is never used, yet it is implied. Jefferson does not propose an ideal; he “recognizes” or acknowledges an equality that already exists, an equality with which the Creator endowed “all men.”

In principle, Jeffersonian equality refers to a number of concepts that make up equality as an American ideal.

Equality of Value

If “all men” received the same “endowment” from the Creator, then all men are of equal value before that Creator. This value must be regarded, asserted, and protected by the sovereign or the state. Immanuel Kant proposed a famous principle called the “Categorical Imperative”: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means to an end.” This is, in some ways, a reformulation of Christ’s admonition, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”⁴ These two principles call upon us to use our need to be treated fairly and with dignity as a guide for the treatment of others. Yet Kant goes further, explicitly calling on us to treat ourselves as an end or as possessing inherent value, and to treat others likewise because we are equally valuable.

Equality of Capacity

Equality, for Jefferson, was not limited to inherent value endowed by our Creator. He also believed that central to that inherent value was a capacity that specifically characterizes human beings. Jefferson thought that to be a human being was to be a “choosing being.” Therefore, the basis of morality, the basis of the principles of virtue, responsibility, diligence, and prudence, and the basis of independence is our capacity to choose. This capacity to choose is equal in all men since it is at the heart of what it means to be human.

Equality Before the Law

The notion in law that “justice is blind” implies that justice can make no distinctions among those who stand before it; all humanity is equally dealt with according to the rule of law. This operational equality was central to the thinking of the Founding Fathers. Their goal was to erect a commonwealth of laws, not of men, to rid the political imagination of the specter of men in secret, dark, and high places deciding on the fate of their fellow men without recourse to a universally applied set of principles and rules. Taken together, the three principles of equality presented above constitute Jefferson’s notion of equality. And together they advanced a new thinking in the making of nations: The first two—equality of value and capacity—are endowments, and equality before the law is the operational principle by which the first two are constantly maintained.

Yet of all the principles advanced by Jefferson, equality has been the most controversial because however conceived, equality is a difficult concept to enact, since everyone has a personal view on the notion and function of equality. Moreover, principles applied to a living situation often become less than the sum of the whole. Wherever individualism is a guiding principle, as in America, the ideal and practice of equality can present a state of conflict. Equality can be interpreted as “sameness,” yet individualism defies that idea. Some people may take it to mean they deserve an equal share of what others possess, even if they have not labored for it. But our American notion of equality is the opportunity to labor according to one’s own desire for improvement and advancement, though it may not produce equal results. And once we have labored we have the equal protection of the law to preserve that for which we labored.

Equality based on sameness is not the American principle. And sameness in all things was never a goal for Jefferson or the Founding Fathers.

Any interpretation of the value of equality that goes beyond securing the endowments, attempting instead to guarantee equality of results or outcomes, is not in line with the principles upon which this country was founded.

In America, though not without its incidences of similar acquisitive habits, the primary means of wealth accumulation was and is to work for it, to earn it, or to invest it and receive returns on investment. This was and is a sea change from the means and methods of the old world. Since the individual is preserved against the state in America, naturally government is limited. As such, it falls to the individual to advance his interests or pursue his happiness accordingly as his talents and desires dictate. The outcome of this individual enterprise cannot be guaranteed in an American sense, because the state is legitimized by the individual and therefore cannot guarantee the success—however relative—of any individual at another’s expense.

A notion of equality that attempts to ensure certain outcomes based on the actions of individuals, dispersing the resulting benefits without regard for effort or talent, would amount to a constant recalculation of equality based on the prevailing ideology of whoever is in power. An ideology that demands that every human being, regardless of his commitment to his own well-being, deserves certain benefits whether he exercises his freedom to attain them or his opportunities to exploit them, is repugnant to the Jeffersonian principles. Equality of outcomes is antithetical to what America has stood for since its beginning.

In establishing the nation, our Founding Fathers decided there was something more fundamental than the freedom to choose, and that was the equality of the capacity for choice. This is a subtle but critical distinction. In the capacity for choice, each man chooses according to his learning, experiences, and situation—his frame of reference.

Therefore, it could be possible, in a nation resting upon the mere freedom to choose, to limit some men and women by ranking them according to a judgment of what they would choose based on their frame of reference. For instance, those who are less educated might be allowed to vote only in certain elections. They are free to choose, but because they are not deemed equal in their capacity to choose, their rights are limited. But the Founding

Fathers—in their wisdom—saw this pitfall, and they opted for something more fundamental: They surmised that each person shall have the right to exercise his freedom based not upon what he chose to do with that freedom, but instead upon this human capacity to choose, in the first instance, and that his choices would be unlimited so long as they did not interfere with the freedom of other people.

In America, the quality of our choices is not to be judged by our governments but by a marketplace of ideas in open competition, where the individual is free to rise or fall, succeed or fail according to her ability and effort. Each person's rights are grounded in his capacity as a human being to choose according to his interests.

INALIENABLE RIGHTS

The notion of inalienable rights (“unalienable Rights” in the Declaration of Independence) is often misperceived. The concept is not intended simply as a limitation on government to deny rights. Rather, the phrase attempts to confirm that the citizen has rights so bound to him eternally he cannot even give them away. Because you are a human being, you possess these rights. It was Benjamin Franklin—in reflection on this—who said, famously, “Those who give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety serve neither liberty nor safety.” This, above all, is the great fountain of joy and magic in American citizenship. The inalienable rights for our citizens recognized within our nation have beckoned broken spirits from across our borders and across the oceans, people who were and are willing to bear every burden in order to receive the privileges of American citizenship.

Life

In America, government was instituted not to preserve the power of the government but to protect the rights of the people, the highest being the inalienable right to life. In its simplest terms, this right means that the government has no power over the life and death of an individual without recourse to law. In monarchies and various other forms of government, the sovereign power had, in its grasp, a power over life and death, more often than not on a whim. In America, no such power was or is available.

Liberty

Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote, “Man is born free, but everywhere is in chains.” Jefferson similarly believed that liberty, like other rights, was a natural right, as did Rousseau. He also believed liberty was “endowed by the Creator.”

Yet liberty, in practical terms in a functioning society, is and must be limited by the liberty of others. At times, any American’s liberty may be limited by government’s attempts to protect this right for others, for which, according to our law, the government must give reasons. But as Jefferson argued, the “balance of Liberty” in a society should only be limited insofar as it interferes with the liberty of others. This is meant to place government under a burden of justification wherever the liberty of the individual is impaired or suffers interference.

By comparison, Madisonian Liberty—or liberty as defined by any Federalist—includes both a limitation imposed by the liberty of others and a limitation imposed by the demands of the state. But this latter consideration, when thought through deeply enough, means that any state or sovereign interest that curtails liberty comes face-to-face with inalienability. The power and privileges of the state are not inalienable; they are conferred onto it by its citizens and thus cannot override the inalienable rights of the citizens.

The Pursuit of Happiness

Some people become very excited when they read that the pursuit of happiness is an inalienable right; they conclude it refers to personal happiness. Others believe the pursuit, not the end result, of happiness is what’s protected. Both interpretations are incomplete.

The happiness Jefferson refers to is not of the “doing whatever I please, when it pleases me” variety. Rather, in America the inalienable right of the pursuit of happiness guarantees that one is free to become the best self that one is capable of becoming.

The concept of happiness or the consistent pursuit of happiness as a critical element of the life of an individual was not a new philosophy when Jefferson introduced it into the Declaration of Independence. Confucius captured it in the Doctrine of the Mean, espousing the lifelong pursuit of the balance between extremes, through which one finds happiness. Like the American values, this pursuit required diligence, prudence, responsibility, and forthrightness.

Aristotle wrote, “He is happy who lives in accordance with complete virtue and is sufficiently equipped with external goods, not for some chance period but throughout a complete life.” These sentiments imply that “happiness” proceeds from a certain type of living, which he described as the function of man:

The function of man is to live a certain kind of life, and this activity implies a rational principle, and the function of a good man is the good and noble performance of these, and If any action is well performed it is performed in accord with the appropriate excellence: If this is the case, then happiness turns out to be an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue.⁵

In his book on Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence, *Inventing America* (Mariner Books, 2002), Garry Wills writes: “Within its original rich context, the pursuit of happiness is a phenomenon both obvious and paradoxical. It supplies us with the ground of human right and the goal of human virtue. It is the basic drive of the self, and the only means given for transcending the self.”

It is possible to attain the highest heights of philosophical obscurity on this issue. But for the sake of simplicity, the pursuit of happiness as Jefferson presented it calls for a republic of virtue: Where citizenship is concerned, Americans take their values from founding principles and not from family connections or cultural traditions. Those principles—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—demand a constant pursuit of one’s best self. And Jefferson’s aim in the Declaration was to cultivate a commonwealth in which each citizen would have the opportunity to pursue his best self and in which as many of these “best selves” as possible could be realized.

THE AMERICAN PARADIGM

All of this discussion about equality and inalienable rights puts a strong focus on the individual, and promotion of individualism was certainly in the forefront of the minds of the Founding Fathers. But the phrase that comes directly after life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in the Declaration of Independence reorients us to its other primary goal: “That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the consent of the governed.” They were envisioning a new form of government,

one that was formed to protect the rights of its citizens but would also function through the consent of its citizens.

Fundamental to this new American Paradigm was a significant departure from the traditional function and purpose of law. In Europe, laws were established to protect the monarch and the crown's wealth and power, as well as to limit the rights of the individual. America, on the other hand, was founded and laws were created to protect the individual and to limit the power and reach of the government, not to secure power for those who govern.

The influence of Rousseau is evident in these ideas; his notion that a "just government derives its legitimacy from the consent of the governed" found a home in Jefferson's thoughts. Once the Founding Fathers had established the protected rights and the values upon which the nation would stand, they had to address the nature of the union they were envisioning to further those values.

By stating that the government we would eventually form would rule by the consent of its citizens, the Founding Fathers were not putting the responsibility for proper operation on the government itself. They put the responsibility on the citizens—in practical terms, those Americans who, in the grip of patriotism and desiring to show their commitment to "putting their nation first," claim they will give up rights in exchange for security risk, and to some extent abandon, both. It is impossible to relinquish your inalienable rights, just as it is impossible to relinquish your responsibility as a citizen to further the values upon which this nation was founded. Recall Franklin's warning: "Those who give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety serve neither liberty nor safety."

Our values are unifying, one leading to the others, and vice versa. They are transitive, eternal, and self-generating; they are kept real in the attitudes and actions of citizens, not through the dictates of sovereigns or executive government. The Preamble to the United States Constitution testifies to the truth of these affirmations:

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Ours is a government of the people, and the people ordain, or establish, a union based on the values that were the foundation of the country. That leads us to a clear picture of the American Paradigm.

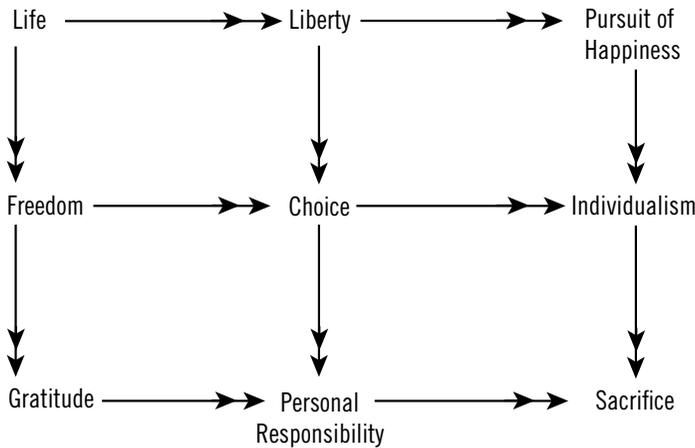


Figure 2.1—The American Paradigm

Altogether, the above graphic captures the meaning and the function of what it means to be an American. You may replace the words with similar ones. But once you begin with the founding values in the Declaration of Independence—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—they lead inexorably to the principles of freedom, choice, and individualism. These values and principles, in turn, require a driving mechanism and so lead necessarily to the central activities of gratitude, personal responsibility, and sacrifice. Government’s role is to act within this paradigm to protect these basic rights, leaving citizens free to seek out and exploit opportunities to become their best selves, wherever they are found and however they are cultivated, subject to law. Moreover, each citizen’s role is to perpetuate the American Paradigm through this driving mechanism of gratitude, personal responsibility, and sacrifice.

GRATITUDE, PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND SACRIFICE

The American citizen can demand protection of his inalienable rights by his government. However, the bestowal of rights and demand for them is not

the limit of the unifying properties of the American values. Without gratitude, there could be no appreciation for the sacrifices that brought us the life and liberties we enjoy, and thus no means of linking the past to the present, which would cause our grand experiment to lose both steam and focus. Without responsibility, there could be no government, given that the government operates by each citizen's consent, which as Rousseau argued is a responsibility that requires participation. Without sacrifice, there would be no vigilance against countervalues and habits of indulgence, nor would there be a means of sustaining the grand American Experiment by challenging the excesses and incongruities that can grow up around a nation founded on individualism and personal responsibility.

The practical aspect of being an American calls for a constant vigilance against selfish hysteria that promotes American life as a win-lose proposition; against an America dominated by the few at the expense of the many or where government seduces the many by taxing the few; and against an America where the protection of laws is broken and the values and principles of the American Paradigm become unsustainable.

If we fail at the self-regulation that sustains open societies, turn the ideal of American values into just an opportunity to express opinions rather than an obligation to assume duties, or perceive the American experience as little more than the right to receive the benefits of America without the responsibilities of being an American, our grand experiment will fail.

This is not a call for less individual competitiveness or for a withdrawal from acting in one's best interests or for self-sacrifice without profit. It is a wasteful and indulgent citizenry that forgets the values that brought their country into being while hoarding the very benefits those values make possible.

In his Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln raised the meaning of the Civil War to an enterprise to preserve and advance the American Paradigm in a universal way:

If we fail at the self-regulation that sustains open societies, turn the ideal of American values into just an opportunity to express opinions . . . or perceive the American experience as little more than the right to receive the benefits of America without the responsibilities . . . our grand experiment will fail.

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

By this resolve, Lincoln has taught us, “We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth.”

BEING AMERICAN, LIVING THE PARADIGM

E pluribus unum (latin for “out of many, one”) is the motto that appears on the seal of the United States. It implies and asserts that the American nation is made up of a cornucopia of cultures. Under this country’s founding principles, the many become one merely by accepting the values and principles themselves. The motto captures the willingness and intention to absorb other peoples into America’s national identity.

In contrast, it is inconceivable for a foreigner to “become” English or French or Latvian. In such places, the new citizen has the task of adopting a culture that is hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of years old, and the individual also battles a lack of lineage that guarantees that one is English or French or Latvian. In America, because we are a country founded on a paradigm of values, principles, and actions, the new citizen adopts this paradigm and instantly becomes part of the American family and thus an heir to all our country represents. Our lineage, and therefore the inheritance we both

received and pass down to future generations, is bound up in the constant translation of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness into the embodiment of gratitude, personal responsibility, and sacrifice.

The dedication of all citizens—whether by birth or naturalization—to this central endeavor is necessary for America’s continued strength. We are unique as a nation in that we, like a family, are a unity of differences, and

We are unique as a nation in that we, like a family, are a unity of differences, and our commitment to choice, liberty, opportunity, and protection of laws is the source of our greatness.

our commitment to choice, liberty, opportunity, and protection of laws is the source of our greatness. To ensure it continues, America must constantly produce Americans who (1) are aware of and grateful for the sacrifices that made them free; (2) possess a full sense of personal responsibility and individualism; and (3) regularly demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of our American inheritance. Only when this activity is transferred to and sustained between generations will it cultivate a renewal of the foundational American spirit. Only this spirit, shared throughout our great land, will permit us to bequeath the security and prosperity we still enjoy. That is to say, the standard on which we originally stood will remain only if we make it stand.

Our lineage, and therefore the inheritance we both received and pass down to future generations, is bound up in the constant translation of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness into the embodiment of gratitude, personal responsibility, and sacrifice.
