

CHAPTER I
HISTORY OF AMERICA
AND THE CHARACTER OF ITS PROBLEMS

From the old countries the earliest settlers here came with variety of desires -- adventure, change, new opportunity, and escape from oppression of many kinds. They braved the ocean in small sailboats, landed on unknown shores infested with potentially hostile red men, to start new lives. By hand they cut down trees, built cabins, cleared fields of trees and rocks, built houses, walls, roads, schools and churches, and sawmills and gristmills powered by the streams. All these tasks took inspiration, courage, patience and physical strength. We are proud and fortunate that our ancestors had all these qualities.

During a century and a half of colonial status, the rule of the English kings came to be regarded as an intolerable aggravation. Independent life in the new world had developed strength of character, self-reliance, and contempt for distant, royal, arbitrary authority. In a long war of rebellion, the English armies sent here were defeated and that country's rule cast off forever.

The founders of our country as a sovereign nation undertook the task of establishing a government representative of the common interests of all the separate states, strong enough to hold them together in effective unity, yet flexible enough to allow all possible autonomy for each state. Above all, the religious and political freedom and equality of human rights of all individuals were to be preserved. Especially fearful of all concentrations of power and authority, they divided government into three branches -- legislative, executive, and judicial -- provided that each should rest on a separate political base, forming a system of "checks and balances" such that no laws, edicts, directives or judgments of any branch could escape some measure of restraint from the others or, through public debate and a free press, the full knowledge and scrutiny of the people. After years of debate, earnest effort and judicious compromise, a constitution, not unacceptable to any but reasonably acceptable to all, had finally been ratified by all states by 1788. Violence and bloodshed were avoided, as a sovereign people, through their representatives, put themselves under a rule, not of men but of laws, for their individual and common welfare. In this age we should look back on that as an accomplishment almost unparalleled in the history of nations: an object of our pride and sustained devotion.

In the late 1700's, the area and resources of the territory within the states, and other that might be acquired, evidently seemed so vast, compared to the population then, that the possible

future lack of abundant natural opportunity for all was overlooked. That was a serious error which since then has hung like a "skeleton in the closet" of political economy, haunting to this day the American dream of freedom and democracy, as we shall see. But the forefathers did exercise real statesmanship in meeting needs obvious at the time, as they established the legal and political backbone of a new nation, in a new world, of a people that had declared themselves independent on July 4th, 1776.

"Four score and seven years" after that declaration, during the height of a period of strained relations and the war between the states, Lincoln, with a rare comprehension of history, said at Gettysburg, "Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any other nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure." Negro slavery and the threatened secession of that part of the country adhering to it were the issues then. With some deep scars from the conflict and much dormant hatred and repressed motion, the nation, finally, did endure.

The country grew, prospered, spread south and west, and became in every way a giant of wealth, industry, and commerce. Many of its laws, customs, and opportunities were an inspiration and hope for millions in many lands of the old world oppressed by tyranny and want. Over the years, millions came here seeking freedom and a better life in the new world. Although self-interest of those desiring to bring in cheap labor may have motivated the welcome offered by some, nevertheless, sincere sympathy for those immigrants desiring the same things we cherished characterized our general welcome. We display on the Statue of Liberty words ascribed by the poet to the Goddess of New York harbor:

"...Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free;
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest tossed, to me.
I lift my lamp beside the Golden Door."*

They came; they found fresh hope, adding their cultural strengths to ours, becoming an integral part of a nation of varied personal powers.

The country matured in every economic and scientific way. Specialization and exchange, both between areas of various natural resources and advantages, and between men of various skills, all grew to a high degree of productivity and interdependence, greatly aided by the growth of highways, railroads, the telephone and telegraph. These factors, combined with the absence of tariff barriers between the states, gave us the greatest "free trade" area anywhere in the world, so that any one anywhere across the whole continent could share the products and advances made everywhere else.

* Emma Lazarus 1849-1887

Compared with our condition as it was around 1790, we had, within the first decade of this century, systematized economic life to a fairly stable pattern, the fight against Nature, so to speak, being virtually won. In the pursuit of our "Manifest Destiny," we had subdued the red man, augmented our territory so as to extend our establishment of states, our division of the land into private holdings, our systems of communications, and our form of law and order, all the way to the Pacific coast.

Mass production was developed by that time, but since then, just within my memory, the assembly line, the automobile, the truck, the tractor, the airplane, the highway, the pipeline, gasoline and electric power, modern printing, refrigeration, television and radio, automatic heating, and many synthetic products all have been brought to perfection to a degree sufficient to change radically the whole way of life and habit of thought of most people. These means, coupled with our systems of transportation and commerce, have made possible a flood of goods and services that would be unbelievable to our forefathers, accustomed as they were to self-sufficiency and hand methods.

However, in spite of all this sort of accomplishment and progress, it is evident that as a nation, or a people, in our adherence to our original ideals and strengths, we have been, since the beginning of this century or earlier, declining. Life no longer offered the challenge it did in earlier times, nor did it require or develop the same all-round personal powers of forethought, self-reliance, or physical strength as formerly. Engagement in two world wars disrupted our economy and the normal living arrangements of millions, undermined ethical and moral standards, and greatly accelerated our becoming saddled with a vast national debt and with huge, costly and all-pervading governmental and military establishments. From these causes and others of longer standing, and in spite of our earlier ideals and opportunities, we are now afflicted with poverty, business depressions, industrial conflict, racial strife, as well as wars and rumors of wars from without.

The problems we face today are no longer those of Man vs. Nature; instead, they are those of Man vs. Man, or perhaps Man vs. A General Situation -- a situation which he cannot conquer, or will not try to conquer, by good old-fashioned personal powers.

Never before in our history has popular and effective belief in economic freedom and independence reached such a low ebb, nor have the expanding and socialistic agencies and measures of government been so habitually appealed to by citizens of all classes to alleviate problems of finance and employment. The common man feels little if any dominion over his own destiny or the general conditions of his working and living; as to the national or world situations he knows he has none at all. Nor does he see any es-

cape. He simply throws up his hands and says, "What can you do?" More aggressive opportunists and pressure groups of all shades fight for special advantage with little consideration for the public good.

The possibility of the actual solution of problems, such as those of unemployment, business depressions, and of slum conditions and crime, or the possibility of men's standing on their own feet, are seldom seriously considered in a basic way; what is usually demanded is that the effects of evil conditions be relieved by stop-gap measures that create other, new problems, leading only to growth of government function and departments, and of a government personnel with vested interests in the thousands of positions thus created. The very words, "health, education, and welfare," all now carry a pathological connotation, and designate matters considered to be functions of government. We now live in a country cursed by the accumulation of unsolved problems and by the growing burden of the costs, complications and aggravations of governmental palliatives, institutions and agencies of relief and Robin Hoodism and of official tampering with economic affairs.

Then too, that dormant hatred and repressed emotion, remaining after "the war between the states", has violently erupted. Those that we freed from nominal slavery a century ago have, ever since, been brought up to know, academically, of this country's professed traditions of equality and justice, have been forced to live under its laws, and to share the burdens and sacrifices of its military defense, but have been confined to the economic and social status of third-class citizens.

And further, for the sake of the people as a whole, we have not maintained equal access to the gifts of Nature--land--with its areas, forces, substances, and values, the fair sharing of which is so essential to personal independence, life, and liberty.

For these sins and failures, we are reaping a harvest of intensifying poverty, crime, violence, hatred, and disunity at home, and of skepticism and scorn abroad.

Certainly now, just as much as in the dark days of November, 1863, we are still "testing whether that nation....can long endure".

These are some of the important facts and feelings within what is called THE LAND OF THE FREE AND THE HOME OF THE BRAVE. It is but cold comfort to know that in many other countries morale and conditions are no better.

With all its uniquely democratic beginnings, its traditional ideals, its natural opportunities and great facilities for supplying to all people every reasonable, material need, why should this country be afflicted with the character of conditions and problems that so widely prevail within it?

Chapter II will describe general conditions in the life of the people of the last century; Chapter III will take up conditions in this one, the two indicating the general effects of progress during the past hundred years.