



Freedom and Unity

America was founded by immigrants from many nations of diverse political ideals, disparate religious beliefs, social backgrounds (French aristocrats, Irish serfs, Chinese coolies), different races (white, black, oriental), and a multitude of linguistic groups. They shared only one thing in common that bound them to one another – a common quest for liberty, a love of freedom.

They discovered that freedom in the New World in a measure never before imagined or realized elsewhere: *political freedom* to speak whatever they chose and elect their own leaders at a time when monarchy still reigned supreme in Europe, the right to vote was confined to three percent of Englishman, and candidates for Parliament came almost exclusively from the upper class; *religious freedom* to believe, speak and worship according to their own dispositions – be they Puritan, Quaker, Anabaptist, Mennonite, Jesuit, Anglican, Lutheran, Huguenot, Catholic, Jewish, Calvinist, Methodist, or a host of others; *economic freedom* where anyone could become anything and rise from rags to riches within a lifetime, where huge chunks of land were given almost free for the asking, where wages rose to ten times the level prevalent in Europe due to the perennial shortage of workers; *social freedom* from class discrimination, where an impoverished boy born in a log-cabin and self-educated could rise to become the President of the country at a time when the European society was still dominated by an aristocracy and landed gentry that occupied all senior positions in government, church, military and universities; and *cultural freedom* from discrimination based on birth and lineage that still marked an English or Frenchman according to his family of origin and his linguistic accent.

“Abraham Lincoln believed in the sanctity of these two apparently contradictory and irreconcilable goals – freedom for all and unity for the nation – and was willing to risk all and sacrifice everything else for the sake of realizing them.”

So great was the freedom in America that a visiting French prison administrator, Alexis de Tocqueville, wrote his famous book *Democracy in America* in 1832 marveling at what to Europeans was unimaginable, and a century later his fellow countryman Charles de Gaulle (not known for his excessive love of America) was compelled to proclaim the same while walking the streets of New York. Freedom and freedom alone united these diverse people and molded them into a nation that multiplied rapidly in numbers and expanded rapidly in space until they reached across the continent to the Pacific Ocean.

Yet, it was also the issue of freedom that divided America and Americans from the country’s very inception, when slave-owning southern plantation owners refused to join the newly established United States of America without assurances that their black slaves would be regarded under law as personal property, rather than as human beings. Jefferson’s

famous declaration that ‘All men are created equal’ was modified in practice to mean all white men – not blacks who were merely property, not even white women, who did not attain the right to vote till 135 years after the Declaration of Independence. Many of those who had fled to America in quest of liberty were unwilling to extend the same gift to others, if they could benefit from depriving others of the same privileges they enjoyed. The Southern economy rose and prospered for a time on the strength of slave labor, as wealthy monarchs and emperors had ruled elsewhere in the past on the strength of the sacrifices of their people.

The dispute over freedom was a slim crack in the original constitution of the country which gradually widened into a fissure and broadened into a chasm that threatened and nearly succeeded in destroying the confederation of states and splitting it asunder. The American Civil War – the first modern war and bloodiest ever fought until that time – began in 1861 to determine whether that fracture would become a permanent division of the nation into two or more independent countries or whether the original flaw in the union of former colonies would be permanently eliminated. The war was won and political freedom granted to the slaves due to the leadership of a remarkable man and great leader, Abraham Lincoln, who ardently believed in the sanctity of these two apparently contradictory and irreconcilable goals – freedom for all and unity for the nation – and was willing to risk all and sacrifice everything else for the sake of realizing them.

“Freedom remains an empty promise unless it encompasses not only the right to vote, speak and worship, but also assures the right to work, to a steady income and economic security, to social acceptance and mental development.”

The outcome of the war ruled for Freedom and Unity. Slavery was abolished from the continental USA, as it had already been abolished throughout Europe. The loosely bound confederation of states was forged into a tightly knit federation with a strong federal government empowered to ensure freedom for all Americans. In the following decades America fulfilled its manifest destiny of incorporating all the territories between the Atlantic and the Pacific. It enjoyed the most rapid economic growth in its history and of any nation up until that time. Before the end of the 19th century, it had become the most prosperous nation in the world.

Yet the quest for real freedom had only been won in principle, not in fact. For freedom remains an empty promise unless it encompasses not only the right to vote, speak and worship, but also assures the right to work, to a steady income and economic security, to social acceptance and mental development. Political freedom is the foundation on which economic, social and psychological freedom are to be attained and assured. The rapid spread of higher education widened economic opportunities for many Americans, but for long the blacks were virtually excluded from access to the best schools and higher institutions of learning. Having attained in principle equality before law, they were still oppressed by social and economic discrimination. It took another 100 years or more to translate the promise of

political freedom for the blacks into a modicum of social and economic equality. That struggle is still playing itself out today.

“Political, economic and social freedom have become fertile soil in America for the eventual emergence of psychological freedom – the freedom to be oneself and realize one’s unique potential as a human being.”

In the 21st century, Americans enjoy greater freedom than the people of any nation in history – freedom to think and speak what they wish, worship whatever they please and be whatever their individual propensities urge them to be. More than its wealth or its power, it is that freedom which makes America so deeply appealing and attractive to people all over the world. As an 18 year old Indian woman exclaimed after working in the USA for a year, “for the first time in my life I am treated as though my ideas and opinions matter, that I have capacities to be developed and aspirations worthy of being fulfilled.” Political, economic and social freedom have become fertile soil in America for the eventual emergence of psychological freedom – the freedom to be oneself and realize one’s unique potential as a human being.

The combination of Freedom and Unity in America became a source of inspiration for other nations, for the nationalist movements that ended colonialism in 50 countries after the Second World War, for the founding of the UN as a united community of nations, and the birth of the European Union. Had it not been for the Northern victory in the Civil War, history would have been dramatically different. America would not be and would never have become the world’s most powerful and prosperous nation, the leader of the free world, the embodiment of the human aspiration for freedom. Far more likely, it would have splintered into a dozen or more independent nations and labored over decades to overcome their differences to reunite as the countries of Europe are laboring today. Yet, Freedom remains an unfulfilled idea in America, a distant goal, perhaps even a fading dream. And the reason is still the same. Those who enjoy the benefits won at such great cost and sacrifice by their forefathers seek to preserve their privileged positions and are reluctant to extend and share what they have gained with others. Freedom to them, like to the slave-owning plantation owners of an earlier period, means freedom for themselves, not assured equality for all.

*“Speculation
is financial
slavery.”*

Today, the divide that separates people is economic rather than political – the rights of those who possess wealth opposed to the rights of those who aspire for it and are deprived by a plutocratic political system, by an economy dominated by major corporations and money power, and by the right of financiers to speculate, even when it endangers or destroys the real economy which it is intended to support and deprives millions of their capacity to earn and achieve economic security. Speculation is proclaimed as their sacred right while the right to gainful employment is left unrecognized. Speculation is financial slavery. President

Franklin Roosevelt understood the divisive power of economic inequality and strove to combat it by launching the New Deal. He understood that economic equality makes real political freedom. FDR even planned after the war to introduce a second Bill of Rights to protect employment and other economic rights, but died before he could achieve it. The right to employment is the economic equivalent of the right to vote in democracy. Without access to gainful employment opportunities, freedom is a maimed concept.

The battle won at Gettysburg effectively ended the Civil War, reunited all Americans within a single nation, freed black Africans from slavery and deprivation of their legal rights, and made the USA far stronger than it had been. But the war for Freedom and Unity was not won that day. It continues to be waged on a battlefield that now encompasses the whole globe. Nearly three decades ago another great leader rose inspired by the values of Freedom and Unity. He too risked all to win freedom not only for his own people, but also for the people of many other countries living behind the Iron Curtain and beyond that for humanity as a whole, which was bound and oppressed by the ever-looming threat of total catastrophic war between the superpowers. Mikhail Gorbachev won a huge battle for freedom on behalf of all humanity. Because of his initiatives, a democratic revolution spread throughout Eastern Europe and overflowed to other continents. The world became a far safer, more open, freer place where people could move freely and interact without fear or suspicion. The very founding of the World Wide Web was made possible by Gorbachev's radical initiatives, making possible the extension of freedom globally.

“The very founding of the World Wide Web was made possible by Gorbachev’s radical initiatives, making possible the extension of freedom globally.”

“Every forward step of human progress over the past five centuries has been a step toward greater freedom and greater human unity.”

Still, the war is not over. Political battles are still being waged in many countries. Economic inequality is rising. Plutocracy is even more entrenched than ever before. The unequal sharing of resources threatens the stability of the earth's environment. The whole world is held ransom by the manipulations of financial speculators and the political power of vested interests.

The war is not over, but its inevitable future direction and result are assured beyond doubt. Every forward step of human progress over the past five centuries has been a step toward greater freedom and greater human unity. They are the engines that have unleashed the creative energies of humanity and channeled them through social organization into greater material, social and psychological security, welfare and well-being. The signposts for humanity's future evolutionary progress are unmistakable. Our future lies that way. Every small forward step carries us closer to the goal and our common human destiny.

Garry Jacobs