

December 6, 2004

**The United States of America
A Social Experiment for the Pursuit of Happiness**

By Larry Pisoni

This essay is a work of love toward my adopted country, the United States of America, which is so frequently misunderstood, mostly due to ignorance of the facts and, occasionally, envy or bad faith.

To understand the essence of the United States one should start with its unique birth. Unlike other nations, the US is a product of ideas.

The Vikings and Columbus were the discoverers of the new continent, America, but the founder of the concept of the United States was William Penn, who landed on the shores of the Delaware River in 1682. This virgin land gave him the opportunity to put into practice the ideas of liberty, equality, brotherhood and tolerance, which he was prevented from implementing in Europe. His "Experiment" in Pennsylvania, with its capital, Philadelphia (brotherly love) established the first large communities since the Roman Empire to allow different nationalities and religious sects to live under the same government on terms of equality. Pennsylvania, as a successful experiment in the Age of Reason, deeply interested the intellectual circles of eighteenth-century Europe. They considered the province an illustration of their belief that man could lead a better life without monarchy, feudalism, or religious uniformity.

Although the American colonists considered themselves British subjects, their ruler was far away and communications were slow. This fact, together with the ideas and ideals of the Age of Enlightenment, which were becoming very popular, contributed to a growing feeling of independence from the mother country.

The ancient Greek and Roman classics were read avidly on both sides of the Atlantic. Starting with the beginning of the 18th century, the Masonic brotherhood with its moral commitment of improving the lot of humanity was spreading very effectively among the inhabitants of both Europe and America. The American colonies were gradually becoming ready to go on their own and the Revolution of 1776 matured and exploded as an overdue human rebellion. Very few people at the time could have imagined that the success of the American Revolution would have turned the world upside down. As the author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson predicted: "May it be to the world what I believe it will be...the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings and security of self-government....(Amazing how these concepts could be applied to the situation in the Middle East nowadays)

Ben Franklin was considered by the British "the most dangerous man in America" for his revolutionary ideas. To serve as US ambassador to France, he made a daring crossing of the Atlantic infested with British warships in the fall of 1776. He was able to convince the French government and wealthy idealists to send troops, money and naval forces to provide decisive help to the fledgling American republic. Franklin was so admired by the French that they elected him Venerable Master of their most prestigious Lodge (The Nine Sisters), whose members included Voltaire, D'Alambert, Diderot, Lavoisier, Helvetius, La Fayette and the finest thinkers of the Age of Enlightenment. These men were to lay the intellectual foundations for the French Revolution, based on the same principles that the American Revolution had already implemented. It is a little known fact that the French revolutionaries sent the keys to the Bastille to George Washington, as a tribute to the Americans who had led the way thirteen years before. These keys have been on display at his home in Mount Vernon ever since.

During the summer of 1787 the Constitution of the United States was written by the Founding Fathers. Thomas Jefferson, who was now ambassador to France and could not be present, sent James Madison many of the over 2,000 books, which he had bought in Paris. They included thirty-seven volumes on the new Encyclopédie Methodique, books on political theory and the law of nations, histories, works by Voltaire, Diderot, Mably, Necker, Mirabeau, Montesquieu, Milton, Locke, Hume, Hobbes, Plato, Aristotle etc.

Jefferson would later comment that the U.S. Constitution, a miracle of compromise and wisdom, was the work of demigods. And, in 1887, on the one hundred year anniversary, British Prime Minister William Gladstone made the following declaration:

“ I have always regarded that Constitution as the most remarkable work known to me in modern times to have been produced by the human intellect”.

An illustration of this “most remarkable work” is the system of checks and balances in which the three branches of government control one another as follows:

- (1) the States v. the Central Government, (2) the House v. the Senate, (3) the President v. Congress, (4) the Courts v. Congress, (5) the Senate v. the President (with regard to appointments and treaties), (6) the People and their Representatives, (7) the State Legislatures v. the Senate (in the original election of senators), and (8) the Electoral College v. the People.

Winston Churchill made the following comments: “The great men who founded the American Constitution embodied this separation of authority in the strongest and most durable form. A system of law and liberty under which Americans have thrived and reached the leadership of the world. No constitution was ever written in better English.”

The USA and Europe went along their separate ways for the most part until WWI, when the U.S. decided to intervene. But already in 1915, while the US was still neutral, Herbert Hoover, as a private citizen, organized the C.R.B. (Commission for the Relief of Belgium) to feed German-occupied Belgium and northern France. In the next four years the commission fed and cared for some 10 million civilians. After WWI, President Wilson appointed Hoover US food administrator. Under his management, the US had fed and clothed over 200 million people by 1920. And, during the famine that swept the Ukraine from 1921 to 1923, the American Relief Administration fed millions of Russians, adults as well as children. However, the decisive impact on continental Europe was felt after WWII. The defeat of the Nazis and the Fascists gave the US the opportunity to diffuse its social experiment. With the help of the Marshall plan and NATO, Western Europe began an unprecedented era of freedom, democracy and prosperity.

The years from 1945 to 1989 were characterized by a balance of terror, but during that same period the fortunate European countries under the wing of the United States enjoyed the longest period of peace since the famous “Pax Romana” of 2,000 years before.

Growing up in Italy just after W.W.II, I was personally able to witness America’s benevolence. It started with the care packages that the American families sent to us, followed by the Marshall plan and the constant presence of NATO, which prevented the communists from starting, and easily winning a civil war, which would have transformed the country into a “Soviet Paradise”. As an act of gratefulness, in March 1995, I dedicated a memorial plaque to two B-24 Air Corp American Officers who had been captured and murdered by the Nazis near my home town toward the end of WWII. I called the ceremony “Thank you, America”. We had over 1,000 participants, including the three surviving members of the B-24 bomber. There was ample recognition both in Italy and the U.S., including a page in the Congressional Records. Here are the words that I had cast in bronze for perennial memory:

At this spot, on Feb. 28, 1945
Two American airmen were shot by Nazis.
Lt. Lucian C. Crutchfield, Jr. of San Antonio, Texas
F/O William F. Brooks of Cohoes, New York.
They were two of more than 38,000 Americans
Who gave their lives on Italian soil during WWII
To help Europeans of good will regain freedom
And democracy.

For several years after the end of WWII, the U.S. “strongly encouraged” the pro-western Italian parties to the point that freedom and democracy were practically imposed. In the meantime, the unfortunate countries behind the iron curtain were forced to wait until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 to begin to enjoy the taste of freedom.

In Japan, Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s wise radical reforms from 1945 to 1950 transformed a semi-feudal society into a modern democracy without taking away their cultural traditions. His first move was to import 3,500,000 tons of food from the supplies that the US Army had built up in the Pacific. This decision saved the Japanese from starvation during the first winter after the war. He gave Japan a new Constitution, held free elections, enfranchised the women, released political prisoners, liberated the farmers from an almost total possession of land by feudal lords, established a free labor movement, developed a free press, liberalized education and separated church from state. In three years the US Forces had vaccinated 70,000,000 million people for smallpox and succeeded in curbing the disease, which had been rampant. The same is true for tuberculosis. It was estimated that 2,000,000 people were saved with these health measures.

I have mentioned NATO and the Marshall Plan, but the saga of the Berlin airlift must not be forgotten. When the Soviet Union blocked overland access to West Berlin in June 1948, the US, Britain and to a much lesser extent, France, organized an air supply operation. During the blockade, which lasted about a year, the operations were ongoing on a 24-hour schedule. Altogether, 2,325,000 tons of supplies were airlifted to West Berlin in 277,569 flights. There were 12 crashes in which 31 Americans lost their lives.

In 1973 the Canadian journalist Gordon Sinclair wrote: “ I can name you 5,000 times when the Americans raced to the help of other people in trouble. Can you name me even one time when someone else raced to the Americans in trouble?” The only example I can think of was the French and the Marquis de Lafayette in 1776. By the way, the Americans have never forgotten it, as testified by their battle cry in WWI: “Lafayette, here we come”.

The United States is not interested in acquiring new territories, but its DNA compels it to spread its ideas and ideals for the betterment of mankind. Of course, Americans are bound to make the same errors that afflict the rest of humanity. What counts, however is the validity of the system based on the ideas of freedom and democracy. As Churchill wrote, “Democracy is the worst political system, except for all the others”. By the way, right after his famous “Iron Curtain” speech at Fulton, Missouri in March 1946, Churchill commented that if he could live again he would wish to be born in the United States.

Back in 1888, British journalist James Bryce wrote “in the works of beneficence, no country has surpassed the United States”. One hundred years later, Americans had given \$104.3 billion to charity.

If the U.S. were an imperialistic nation, after winning the war in Iraq in 2003, it would have taken over the oil fields and used the locals as cheap labor. Since so many people continue to believe that the US invaded Iraq only for its oil, it would be convenient to keep it and take full economic advantage of it, but this would betray everything the US stands for. There is a reason why the demonstrators in Tiananmen Square and in Soviet occupied Prague were flying the American flag, as a symbol of freedom.

Vietnam is the only case in U.S. history where a war was lost. From the scant news that we receive from that country is it clear that victory gave their people a rather miserable way of life.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 there were U.S. interventions in Somalia, Africa, the Gulf war and the forced peace in the former Yugoslavia. However, the real turning point in U.S. policy occurred after 9/11. Few Non-Americans have understood the very deep impact of that historical event. It touched a vital live nerve comparable to the infamous bombing of Pearl Harbor. The sleeping giant got angry and woe to the enemies and pseudo friends of the U.S. The new policy is not to wait, but to prevent attacks by acting first. Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 reflect this new policy. Freedom and democracy will be practically imposed in the Middle East and will gradually spread throughout the world. It will probably take a generation, but the winds of freedom have an insuppressible, almost superhuman power that cannot be stopped. The most recent example is the 180° turn in Col. Gheddafy's policies in December 2003. In order to avoid ending up like Saddam Hussein he wisely chose to cooperate.

The diffusion of the English language and the Internet are gradually turning our planet into a democratic global village. If the United States keeps a steady course in its world leadership, it can accelerate the spreading of these beneficial ideas throughout humanity. Since democracies, historically, do not make war on one another this will be a very positive effect..

However, to be more convincing in winning the souls of the people, modern Americans should become more knowledgeable about the idealistic roots laid by our Founding Fathers. Too many Americans have no idea whom to thank for the uniqueness of the U.S. They say: "We are such a new country in comparison with the Europeans". Although the United States is a very young country, it is the first modern democracy. As wisely predicted by Alexis de Tocqueville in his masterpiece "Democracy in America" written in 1831, democracy was destined to spread from America to Europe. The United States had implemented, for the first time in history, the finest ideas of ancient Greece and ancient Rome.

The \$1.00 bill shows the pyramid of human improvement with the motto "Novus Ordo Saeclorum (A new Breed of People) displayed as symbols of the rebirth of people who embrace the American idealistic visions. Without the wisdom and sacrifice of the Founding Fathers, the United States would not exist as such and the inhabitants of the American continent from Alaska to Patagonia would have followed whatever destiny the European powers would have imposed.

So let us treasure the culture and the ideals that created the "United States of America" as a social experiment for the betterment of mankind. If we are able do that, we will provide the necessary cultural support to our economic and military might and will be able to realize the prediction of Turgot, the French Minister of Finance before the French Revolution, who wrote: "America is the only hope for humanity."

What could be more apropos, universal and prophetically immortal than the following wish written by Benjamin Franklin to an English friend right after signing the U.S. Constitution in the fall of 1787, "**God grant that not only the love of liberty, but a thorough knowledge of the rights of man may pervade all the nations of the earth, so that a philosopher may set his foot anywhere on its surface and say, 'This is my country'**".

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PS. This essay has received a letter of commendation from the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice

