



GREAT In the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand and Eight
AMERICAN
Issue 1 **HISTORY PAPERS**

About this issue

By Darrell Sutton

If someone were to ask you “What does it mean to be an American?” What would your response be? A question of this kind would certainly have been answered differently 200 years ago. The aim of these papers is to provide a context in which the reader can arrive at some right answers. Our goals are simple enough: (a) to celebrate the genius of the American system, along with its originators, (b) To provide a framework of reference for the curious, those who question today’s radicalism and can remember when American History was a thrilling study. At the heart of the problem is the lack of knowledge of what “American” as a word, world and culture actually means. Recognizing that much of modern literature has changed over time we have sought to re-inform the masses and re-enforce basic historical truths that each generation of Americans are in need of. In short there is no easy answer to the above question. Today’s society has read and analysed early American documents by means of contemporary criticism. Leaving a huge question mark as to what should and should not be included in the current student handbooks on the history of the United States of America. The emerging voices of dissent are demanding that a more multi-cultural approach be taken when interpreting dated materials, so that other customs may be afforded ‘equal standing.’ Today’s dreary scholasticism is a mass of confusion. Current

literary criticisms begin with false premises, precede upon spurious lines of thought, and reach conclusions that are mostly, if not totally, wrong. Post-modern approaches to literature and feminist views have turned many away from classical based texts which in the beginning undergirded our nation, but are now viewed with an evil eye. I certainly am not one who is in favor of dismissing any department of critical science and scholarship ‘in toto’ (It can be utilized as a useful discipline)¹. There needs to be more restraint applied to one’s conclusions. Our trendy, multicultural attitudes have abolished any sense of unicultural mindset which early on was believed necessary to bind a nation of immigrants into one single entity. What began as a religious experiment, quickly became a European and Continental conflict, and now has become a many cultured clash of civilizations. The title ‘GREAT AMERICAN HISTORY PAPERS’ is a deliberate choice of wording. These were chosen to reflect a mindset that is greatly needed again. Great, as it relates to American is a description we rarely see today in print. Especially, if we desire to view greatness as the Americans of the early years of the USA envisioned it. Character, virtue, morality and values were not vague and ambiguous terms. Western canonical texts had clearly delineated these qualities in old classics like the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer, Virgil’s Aeneid and other varieties of Renaissance literature. Writings which the early settlers would have known of through their Greco-Roman studies in a Latin based education system. Grammar

schools of old were designed to cause students to logically think things thru. Not to challenge any and all traditionally held beliefs. (The critic would use that last line as his/her launching pad.) Having had a firm grasp of the English Language and its proper usages, they were able to publish bestsellers in an artistic and florabundant style of writing. It would then seem that to be great one needed a great mind. Greatness was looked upon as a certain ‘attitude to living in God’s world.’ An acknowledgment that none of the founders would have feared to make. All things being equal, our founding fathers saw a connection between Americanism as a cultural entity and Christianity as a way of life.²

We use the phrase “history papers” to reflect two points that need explanation. (1) We will use ‘history’ in its literal Greek sense.³

Believing that research into the past should deal with the actual source texts and literature. We are able to study any and everything related to our history that is kept in the Library of Congress. In ransacking old and ancient documents we will write of things which will not be pleasant and/or possible to gloss over ie. Conflicts between whites and the early indians, the issue of slavery as an evil and vile institution (and not just ‘a bad’ thing’), early continental persecution of various sects (Catholics specifically) and witch burning trials etc. These were some unforgettable episodes in American history. Despite these (among others) events, a Great nation was forged and is in possession of admirable qual-

“All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Declaration 1776

ities. Many of which need to be set before the eyes of another generation of youth and adults. (2) We will allow the original documents to speak for themselves. The average American has never even read the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution of the United States in their entirety. No wonder there is such confusion over the wording of these documents. Ignorance has provided the fodder that a small class of people use to manipulate the greater portion of the population. Much energy is spent attempting to interpret our founders English dialogues which scholars believe are too nuanced for the average American. The constitutional debates and the subsequent documents (along with the Declaration of Independence) are so clear that it has taken us no less than two generations of anti-American cultural academics to help us misread them. Thus, we shall proceed forward along a most narrow way; providing the reader with ‘close readings’ of early authentic papers. How hard is it for a child to understand “*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.*” Shouldn’t the average American schoolboy and girl be confronted with and instructed by the documents that our ancestors understood to be central to American core beliefs and values?⁴ Aside from this, should they not also be instructed in the context in which their value system developed and later evolved? If your answer is in the affirmative you should enjoy this issue. Hopefully, a new generation will arise who will not be afraid to sing ‘America the beautiful’ or to pray God bless America!

So, with nothing more to add READ ON!

Te Deum Laudamus

NOTES

¹There was a period when library shelves were filled with books that were idealistic to the extreme and took a more romantic view of our history. These books often bended toward hagiography rather than true historiography. If we search antiquity with an eye for sainthood we shoot wide of the mark but if greatness is our target we can hit a bullseye each time. Our forefathers, flawed as they were, were architects of a Republic that is the envy of the world. Its genius lies as much in what they excluded as well as in what they included in the judicial, legislative and executive aspects of our constitution.

²Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty – as well as the privilege and interest – of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.” John Jay original chief justice of the supreme court. “All the miseries and evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambitions, injustice, oppression, slavery and war proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible. Noah Webster.

³Euripides defines it in one of his fragments when he says “Happy is he who lays hold of the lore of history (*historia*) . . . seeking to behold the ageless order (*kosmos*) of deathless nature (*physis*)..the manner of its structure, and whence it arose, and how.” The legacy of the Ancient world, 1947 by W.G. de Burgh.

⁴It should be noted that we will not argue for or against any of the Father’s ‘personal’ salvation. We want only to underscore one fact. That is, whatever one’s views of their growth in God’s grace, all are able to see that the Bible, in general, and Christianity, in particular, were their models for nation building.

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The Early History of the Pilgrims and Puritans

By Jon Brueggemann

The purpose of this publication is to recount the captivating story of America. To reclaim the truth of America’s foundations. To rescue from the sea of distortion, revision, and omission what our educators saw fit to teach for 180 years. To record, once again, what in times past was rehearsed for generations to our youth as lessons of history. There are of course dark moments and blots of embarrassment on America’s historical landscape, as there is for any nation. Nations are comprised of people, and people are inherently fallible, flawed and consequently destined for some error. Under the guise of political correctness, and multi-culturalism we have been presenting a history that highlights, to the point of emphasis, these “blemishes.” As a result, students conclude America’s past is comprised solely of injustices and wrong doing. Consequently, the last few generations have been taught a different history. A history that almost completely fails to include the burning passion that brought the first European settlers to this continent. A passion and commitment that would cause later generations to foster the words “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights – that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” (Declaration of Independence). These revisions have robbed our public of the very roots needed to guide us through our future. As Thomas Jefferson once stated “History, by apprising them of their past enables them to (accurately) judge the future.” The great majority of Americans today live under false pretenses concerning the beginnings of our nation. Without an accurate understanding of our heritage, Americans have been consistently and systematically surrendering precious freedoms granted them by the foresight of our founders. America has a wonderful history. To the detriment of our chil-

RECOMMENDED READING:

1776 by David MacCullough

NEXT ISSUE:

“Beginnings of a New Nation”



dren, this story has not been told for most of the last 50 years.

To accurately understand the early history of the American nation, one must research the people who first came to settle this continent. These are the people that crossed the Atlantic in the early 1600's. The Pilgrims who first came to these shores did not initiate their course of action lightly. Their decision to sail the Atlantic came after great consideration. After all, crossing the turbulent oceans in the 1600's was quite perilous indeed, even for the most trained of sailors. However, they were forsaking an Old World, a world where their beliefs and principles could hardly survive, much less thrive. These principles had become convictions, and they held these convictions to the point of death. What restrictions existed in England (and Europe) that could be so contemptible? What aspects of the Old World environment were so oppressive that these Pilgrims considered it worthy to risk their lives by traveling to an entirely new world, a land where no guarantee of safety (not even survival) was certain? The only promise awaiting them was freedom! Life would contain only what they could fashion of it. Yet, this somewhat meager promise was sufficient. With this hope, they boarded wooden vessels with children and possessions. Again the question must be asked, Why was life in England so completely unacceptable?

To answer this question some perspective is needed. The social and political conditions of 1600's England, and Europe for that matter, were wrought over time. These conditions owe much of their origin to an invention. Just as Ford's automobile and the Wright brothers airplane revolutionized forever the travel abilities of man, a young German named Gutenberg would create a device that would slowly, over time, change the world. The year was 1450 and Johannes Gutenberg was completing work on a moveable type printing press. At first glance, the importance of such a mechanism may not seem apparent. However, up to this point in history, the only means by which written words could be reproduced was by the ardent, time consuming process of manually transcribing the material by hand. Consequently, large quanti-

ties of information were nearly impossible to distribute throughout the public. Knowledge was constricted. With the advent of the printing press, information could spread with exponential speed. One man and a printing press could reproduce what scores of scribes could not. No longer would books need to be tediously copied by hand. Books and other writings could be produced in great numbers with resounding speed. The information contained in these publications could now be spread among the nations and reach untold masses of people.

The first book to be printed on the Gutenberg press was the Bible. This fact may also seem irrelevant upon first notice, but consider that until Gutenberg, the Scriptures were written only in Latin and held almost exclusively by the Roman Catholic church leadership. The people were not privileged to read the Bible for themselves. This meant the people were at the mercy of the Pope and his bishops to accurately transmit the Word of God contained in the Bible. This arrangement of power led to abuses and corruption. All this would change after the 1450's. Gutenberg's press allowed for the first time the circulation of the Scriptures to the common man. No longer would the clergy and church government hold the Word of God hostage. With knowledge of the Scriptures now in the hands of the people, a sustained far reaching movement would begin. It came to be known as the Reformation.

Social Climate in Medieval Times

The men who translated the Bible from Latin into their native languages were also instrumental in bringing about the Reformation. Their lives illustrate the lack of freedom that existed during the several hundred years prior to the Pilgrims departure from the Old World. The seemingly simple freedom of reading the Bible in one's native tongue came at extraordinary cost. In the 1380's, John Wycliff produced the first hand written English bible manuscripts. Forty-four years after his death, his bones were dug up, crushed and scattered in the river. John Hus, a follower of Wycliff, opposed the tyranny of Rome and advanced the idea of reading the Bible in one's own language. With Wycliff's bible manu-

scripts used as kindling, Hus was burned at the stake in 1415. The Roman church deemed the knowledge of the Scriptures so dangerous to their strangle on power, that it threatened anyone possessing a non-Latin Bible with execution. Foxe's Book of Martyrs records that in 1517, seven people were burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic Church for simply teaching their children to say the Lord's prayer in English rather than the defunct Latin! The papal powers desperately tried to keep the written Word of God out of the hands of the people. But, as history proves, those fighting for freedom eventually overcome persecution and oppression. These translators were quite motivated. They recognized the need to put the Word of God into the hands of every person. One such man was William Tyndale of England. He worked under great persecution and threat of death. The following quote from Tyndale embodies the views of the reformers: "I defy the Pope and all of his laws: and if God spares my life, I will cause the boy that drives the plow in England to know more of the Scriptures than the Pope himself." (Book of Martyrs ch 12) Ultimately, after eluding capture for years, Tyndale was arrested, strangled and then burned at the stake in 1536. These were the conditions that existed just prior to the pilgrims.

In England the Reformation was being pushed by a group that was becoming known for their zeal. They were a strict people that desired a rigid adherence to the Bible. They pressed for reforms in the church, reforms for a biblical worship. They resented the Pope (or in some instances the King) dictating their worship services through bishops that were appointed, compensated, and thus controlled by the Pope. This group desired accountability only to God and His scriptures, not to any man assuming the authority of God. They voiced their desire to "purify" the church of England. Consequently, these reformers became known as Puritans. Once the people were able to read the Bible independently, glaring distinctions were apparent in what the Roman Church was teaching and what the people were reading. These departures from scripture were crucial to Puritans. They insisted on simple biblical standards, free from the trappings of Rome.

William Bradford (1590-1657) was the leader of the Pilgrims who came to America in 1620. He would be elected 30 times as governor of the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts. In his journal "Of Plymouth Plantation" Bradford outlines his views of the Reformation: "The one side labored to have the right worship of God and discipline of Christ established in the church, according to the simplicity of the gospel, without mixture of men's inventions; and to have and to be ruled by the laws of God's Word." (chapter 1) The Puritans clearly wanted to exercise "the simplicity of the gospel." Their theology would be based exclusively on the Bible. Bradford believed that state-run religion included "... a number of vile ceremonies, with many unprofitable canons and decrees, which have since been as snares to many poor and peaceable souls . . ." (Plymouth Plantation ch 1)

Just as the translators were severely persecuted for their efforts, the Puritans and their insistence on biblical guidelines became quite unsuitable for the established Church of England (separated branch of Rome). This simple devotion toward the Bible resulted in torment. William Bradford describes these conditions that eventually forced some Puritans to seek a better life elsewhere: "But after these things; they could not long continue in any peaceable condition; but were hunted and persecuted on every side, so as their former afflictions were but as fleabittings in comparison of these which now came upon them. For some were taken and clapt up in prison, others had their houses besett and watch night and day, and hardly escaped their hands; and the most were faine to fly and leave their houses and habitations, and the means of their livelihood."

Bradford continues, "Yet these and many other sharper things which afterward befell them, were no other than they looked for, and therefore were the better prepared to bear them by the assistance of God's grace and spirite; yet seeing themselves thus molested, and that there was no hope of their continuance there, by a joint consent they resolved to goe

into the Low-Countrys, where they heard was freedom of Religion for all men; as also how sundry from London, and other parts of the land had been exiled and persecuted for the same cause, and were gone thither; and lived at Amsterdam, and in other places of the land. So after they had continued together aboute a year, and kept their meetings every Sabbath, in one place, or other, exercising the worship of God amongst themselves, notwithstanding all the diligence and malice of their adversaries, they seeing they could no longer continue in that condition, they resolved to get over into Holland as they could. Which was in the year 1607 and 1608 . . ." (Plymouth Plantation ch. 1)

Thus, these Pilgrims sailed for Holland seeking some refuge from the dangers encountered in England. However, life in Holland could not satisfy their longings either. So, after eleven years it was concluded that Holland was not the answer. Bradford delineates the reasons for leaving Holland and setting sail for America: 1) The hardships that were in Holland did not entice some family members and others of like faith to join them, but rather "chose the prisons in England, rather than this liberty in Holland, with these afflictions." 2) The members were advancing in age and in a few years would "sink under their burdens." 3) They felt their children could not be properly raised in Holland – "they saw their posterity would be in danger to degenerate and be corrupted." 4) "Lastly, (and which was not the least), a great hope and inward zeal they had of laying some good foundation, or at least to make some way thereunto, for the propagating and advancing of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world; yea though they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others for the performing of so great a work." The Pilgrims were transparent in their desire to dedicate a land toward the simple biblical truths they held in such regard. Anchored off the shores of America, the Pilgrims drafted the first governing document of the Plymouth Colony. It became known as the Mayflower Compact. Its opening words also illustrate the inten-

tions of the Pilgrims: "Having undertaken, for the Glory of God and advancement of the Christian Faith . . ." Their purpose for traveling to this New World was not economic prosperity. Their purpose was embedded in the ideal of freely worshipping God according to conscience. Their intentions were clear. Their motivations declared.

Today, in the 21st century, it has become taboo to discuss the inspiration of the Pilgrims. The facts surrounding their Christian passions and motives seemed to be pushed further into obscurity with every textbook printed in America. Clearly, it is impossible to accurately understand the foundations of America, if we refuse to acknowledge the facts present at her origin. America was most certainly founded as a Christian nation. It was the solemn purpose of the Pilgrims to find a land where they could exercise their religion free from government intrusion. They had escaped a world where the state government was controlling the church. 169 years after the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, America's founding document, the U.S. Constitution, would enumerate 10 basic rights to its citizens. The first one to be enumerated begins "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . ." Clearly, all restriction is placed on the government, not the church. The government is never to have authority to interject into the church. Yet, today that idea has been completely reversed. Many Americans have been convinced that the church is to have no voice in government. Nothing could be further from the truth. The founding fathers, just like the Pilgrims, simply did not want the government interfering with their religion.

Today we find ourselves facing great challenges in our culture. However, if we can find even a sample of the courage and conviction that inspired our Pilgrim founders, we will once again revive the truth of America's origin.

"... Our founding fathers saw a connection between Americanism as a cultural entity and Christianity as a way of life."