

THE DNA  
OF  
Democracy

EXCERPT

## ORIGINAL POWERS IN AMERICA

The springs of naturally occurring societal associations, based on the “natural man” were contrary in nature to those of tyranny; they arose among like-minded people, whereas the powers of tyranny are always imposed from above. The DNA of democracy, as uniquely exemplified in early America, displays a diffusion of power; the more broadly it was diffused, the more new and subtle powers came into being, into a broad structure that empowered a much wider range of people as individuals, as members of families, and as members of larger associations. This sharing of power throughout society created strength by its very multiplicity and began with the individual.

### The Individual

When one speaks of individual liberty, as the original rebel generation did, they were writing at the time of an unknown ideal. In European society, everyone lived under an overlord. If you were a serf, your local aristocrat was the overlord of your civic and commercial life and the church was the overlord of your soul—by both you were told what to do and you did what you were told! For on the authority of your overlord rested your life, its opportunities and its rewards, and the security of everything...even your chains. Your very life was propped up and dependent on your overlords, and this system was extended as the overlord to your local aristocrat was a greater overlord aristocrat until power concentrated in the overlord of the overlords—the king.

This ages-old social arrangement propelled the English exiles seeking to escape the rigid pyramid of king, aristocracy, church, and beneath all, a client population of whom were demanded servitude, tribute, and unquestioning belief.

The basic revolution, growing out of the English Civil War, became this: that rather than serve at the whim and for the material fortunes of one's overlords of church and state, the individual should be free to serve themselves and their beliefs, without the props, confinements and dues, both material and spiritual, which were the societal provisions of European governance, just as it had been for the Pharaohs. The exiles sought to sail away from the pyramidal architecture of feudal tyranny!

Venturing onto a largely unknown ocean was physically perilous. Planning to settle on an unexplored, unmapped continent, to face unknown hardships was equally dangerous. Abandoning the social security of home, for a society not yet formed was daunting, but it was where, as Woodrow Wilson averred centuries later, "the original powers of society" might be born.

The first of such original powers resided, as the rebel's ideal imagined, in the individual. On the new continent, the individual had no help, nor any familiar surrounding confinement to call home. The individual literally gazed into an open wilderness. If you remember our earlier mention of the knights of Arthurian legend: Each knight must strive to find the Grail through travels and trials and by his trials he must prove himself worthy of it. Each knight must venture alone through an unmarked part of an unknown and uncharted forest on a path that has never been travelled before and is therefore unique to the individual traveler: that was America.

In the New World, there was no overlord whose wholly owned village would supply the axman to clear the forest, or the blacksmith to forge an iron plow to till the newly cleared

field, or the ox to pull the plow, or the forester to hew the trees, or the mill to hone the wood, or the carpenter to frame a hut, or the bricklayer to lay a hearth, or the wife to make a home. Striking out from the relative safety of this social settlement, the individual had to possess the skills and strength to gather, plant, harvest, hone, build and defend everything—without the props of an overlord, and without the security of his former home. The individual had to be a forester, a hunter, a carpenter, a farmer, a sometime soldier, and a hundred other things, as well as a worthy husband, to be truly self-reliant. The individual had to enlarge himself in every sense, far beyond former confinements...

The women of the new continent encountered an equal necessity for self-reliance. The surrounding dangers and necessary labors of the new world also fell squarely on her shoulders: women were adventurers, discoverers and soldiers, builders and farmers, every bit as much as their male counterparts. They were the everywoman of the Arthurian legends: they had to be. Every labor and every venture expanded the new American woman's strengths and defined her superiority to the obstacles arrayed against her. As our prophet de Tocqueville noted, "Equality comes into play when American men display, as they customarily do, full confidence in the reason of their mate and a profound respect for her liberty." American women, since the beginning, have flourished through self-reliance. And through the adverse trials of centuries, they have always earned respect and defended their own hard-won freedom.

Children, both male and female, were raised at the edges of the forests and on the rigors of the farms, earning their strengths. The frontier quickly made adults of adolescents who had to learn to be excellent fishermen, hunters, farmers, soldiers and providers at the earliest ages. Nature, necessity and frontier parents were hard nurses, allowing no quarter for softness in their children!

Without the protections, provisions or oppressions of a class of overlords, the individual in America became exponentially strengthened in body and mind, to think and act independently in his or her own interests rather than to serve the interests of overlords. And thereby, this independence became a force for individuals to grow beyond themselves—and beyond any lingering memory of the limitations imposed by the thousands of years of their confinement.

## The Family

The concept of family was very different in the Old compared to the New world. In the old world the family was always a societal structure within a much larger structure. The common family served an aristocratic family. In America, the family became the utmost fundamental structure and it was joined and stood independently of any other. To begin, marriage in America was never a matter of arrangement, but a more natural matter of attraction, romance and, yes, merit. One chose one's husband, one chose one's wife—each had to merit the other.

There was never an aristocrat whose blessing was necessary to make or to approve a match. No debt was owed to such an approval. A married couple in America have always freely chosen each other to create the fundamental societal bond of marriage out of free choice and love...or at least out of self-interest.

The children of such an American union were never the “subjects” of overlords first, and family members second. They were solely the beloved fruit and concern of their parents. A parent's concern was not “how best will this poor child live out a life of servitude to our common overlord?” The concern was: how best will this child fulfill its distinct inborn talents in life?

How will this child grow strong enough to achieve genuine free will and best exercise it?

The concern of overlords, past and present, is always how little will be necessary to hold their subjects (and subject families) down, while they harvest the fruits of their labors! In America, where family is the primary societal structure, the concern has always been: how best to set our children free to raise themselves up! The overlord's concern was and is: how shall we keep our subjects weak, that they might serve us without complaint? In the American family, the question is: how will our children achieve optimum strength, first to meet necessity and then to achieve greater things? The concern of overlords is for themselves: how to reap from subject families. The concern of an American parent is for their children—period. In Europe and England, only aristocratic families ever exercised the full rights of family prerogatives which common colonial families found in America.

In the new world, if a family member were in some manner weak or unable to achieve the strength to live independently, a parent's concern was to solve the problem to the best benefit of the child, so they could live a fruitful life. In the old world, an overlord's first concern for a subject family member's problem was to cast the problem off on someone else (normally the church), to defray the cost. The concern of the American family is for its members, as individuals, and this out of love for the child. The overlord's concern, then and now, was and is to accumulate wealth and power, at the expense of everyone else's children.

In the old world, when the phrase "family first" was used, it meant the overlord's family first—and that of their subjects and their families last. In America, it meant every citizen's family first, as an independent, individual societal unit, strong in itself, of a character distinct and capable of standing alone. This is the fundamental difference in the origin and substance

of the American family, and a fundamental difference between democracy's and tyranny's DNA. For these families of European exiles were never the subject or the prey of anyone. Family did not make one weak or prone to being submissive to a higher authority who determined a family's future, Family in America gained strength in numbers by addition, until the sum of its common force multiplied its power.

Again, there is tragedy underlying this unique advent of greater freedom for one segment of the American population. Some of the Europeans brought the construct of a pyramidal tyranny with them to form on southern plantations which made another American population into subjects of slavery—the new serfs. These were subject to overlords, to overseers, who held them down as individuals, who determined their family's futures, who dictated their labors, who determined what they would be clothed in; what they would be fed, where they would be housed—the direct opposite of what was occurring on the northern family farms.

And the opening and settling of the frontier, which enhanced this new freedom for the self-exiled Europeans, came at the cost, in direct proportion, of the freedom of Amerindians, who had to choose whether to fight the growing tide of immigration and become domestic farmers of a kind themselves or fight for their distinct way of life.

## The Faith

The European persons who came to America were of many sects, with very differing views of their common God. Among them were Calvinists, who believed in predestination and that every event in one's life was planned before their birth and God's will could only be discovered by revelation... Not much to choose there. Then there were Puritans, Baptists, Anglicans,

Presbyterians, Lutherans, Quakers, Congregationalists and Methodists...Finally, there were the Deists, who believed God could only be found through reason—not revelation; that God created the Earth and left this beautiful and bountiful mechanism alone. A person’s Heaven or Hell were of their own making, based on the choices they decided to make... A lot to choose there!

So, the whole spectrum of beliefs on the nature of God were shipping to America, and no two sects agreed on any two things together. But they did all agree on one thing! The idea of a single orthodox religion in America—was hated by everybody. It was still within living memory that people in the old country were ripped limb from limb or racked or hanged or burned at the stake, if they did not believe precisely what the state church and king believed! They all agreed that it was better to have their jealous and differing views about their common God. Their first and common faith was in their right to maintain their differences. It was also their common belief as Thomas Paine wrote, that “every religion is good that teaches man to be good!”

There were other key differences in the American brand of faith communities compared to their European counterparts. When one went to church in Europe, it was normally in a Cathedral of enormous proportions which was built centuries before, for the glory of some long-ago king, emperor or pope. Beautiful buildings wherein the ornaments of the church were of silver and gold and the statuaries were oversized and sculpted of monumental marbles. In America, communities of the congregants, seeking a place to worship as individuals, voluntarily formed into one community, who built their own churches by themselves, from timbers of the surrounding forests. They were simple.



The clergy in Europe were many and they held lucrative positions, they normally lived in rich houses; the higher clergy lived in palaces. In America, where there was a lack in the numbers of the clergy, congregants became the clergy—the position became democratic, as did the decision making concerning anything relevant to the community-based church. Women, who were not nuns, had vastly more influence in the American churches, they were leaders in their congregations! In Europe, the power base of the church was in Canterbury or Rome, some distant place no normal person ever saw. In America, it was down the street, in the church the community built, and there the community decided its own faith destiny.

Lastly, in Europe, the concept of the Christ, that was painted on Cathedral ceilings was more that of the King of Heaven, wearing the rarest garments, surrounded by riches and enthroned on clouds. In America, Christ was conceived as being more like the common congregants: he was a carpenter, who was born in a barn: he was a commoner, who earned his crown of thorns by his relentless labors.

Beyond these differences, another emerged in a movement called “The Great Awakening” which was a popular wave of belief in the 1730’s and 1740’s; it was a strong enough idea to cross America’s sectarian lines of faith. It was a new emphasis on the third person of the Trinity, The Holy Spirit, whose influence on the faithful was personal and individual, and not dependent on any organized faith; an individual’s experience of the Holy Spirit was their own. Evangelical preachers of the Great Awakening sought to include every person in conversion, regardless of their gender, race or economic status. It was the ultimate force in faith’s decentralization and equalization in America. An amazing number of the free African population of America converted to being Baptists during this tidal motion of faith.

Concurrent with this wave of individualism and equality in faith, came the concept of “Moral Liberty,” as spoken of by our light bearer Rousseau, thus: “Moral liberty alone renders man the master of himself, for the impulse of mere appetite is slavery, and obedience to the law, which one prescribes to oneself—is liberty itself.” The ultimate authority to seek consent from—was in one’s own chest.

These differences not only created an insular separation of the faithful from church authority, it also dictated a separation between the concerns of one’s individual authority over one’s self and family, the one’s faithful authority in a community—and the other. The civil authority—best exemplified by one of the favorite biblical characters of America’s early era: Gideon.

It may be remembered that after the Israelite Gideon, as general, succeeded in many signal victories on ancient battlefields, Israel’s priests offered he and his sons and his son’s sons an hereditary crown over the temple and the people, that they might rule Israel in both civil and spiritual matters, personally... and eternally. Gideon made an unexpected reply to their offer, telling them: “I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you. The Lord shall rule over you!” Gideon was as clear in his mind as was his Patriarch Jacob... as to what was the province of the individual, what was the province of family, what was the province of faith and what was the province of a civil authority—and so were the exiles from European tyranny, who landed in America,

From the first days, moral authority in America was not subject to, but was complimentary to civil authority—the two were deemed to be different and separate from one another. The political realm was viewed rightly, as a field for the contest of many competing ideas, while the moral realm was one of certitude based on personal belief and thus, one of peace: where one lives with one’s own conscience, with one’s own moral

decisions, and voluntarily in community with persons of like beliefs. As de Tocqueville found, religion regards “civil liberty as a noble exercise of the intellectual faculties of man.” While liberty regards religion as “the companion of its struggles and triumphs,” and “the divine source of its rights and the safeguard of its mores,” which in turn serves civil authority to “guarantee the laws.” Each authority, uniquely in America, has always served as advisor to the other, and, most importantly, as a check on each other’s exercise of power.

Faith in America devolved spiritual authority to a democratic congregational level, there was never one center of power, all religion became local; faith in America, empowered the individual... and distinctly separated itself from civil authority. The accompanying diversity of Faith in America has always had one common virtue: its multiplicity has become a bulwark of protection for individual liberty, here, in America—unlike anywhere else on earth.

## Associations

Before there was any formally established government in America, there were associations. The men who signed the Mayflower Compact constituted one such association of like-minded individuals deciding how their society would be arranged. Early common associations of America were devoted to charity: individual churches combined in their shared interests of helping the poor among them, again with a local view to giving the needy a helping hand, rather than to control and oppress the destitute. Early associations later developed into such local groups as the Guardians of the Poor or the Alms House of Philadelphia.

Other naturally occurring associations were joined for the purposes of education, as when communities of parents gathered

to decide on a curriculum best suited to the sole purpose of educating their children. Parents, principally mothers, thereby became involved in their children's lives through their schools, as they were through their churches—in associations. Visitors to America, in its early history, were amazed at the education “farmers” received in the colonies: most people could read and write, and most could speak with some knowledge on a range of subjects. Back in Europe, not so many years earlier, you either knew Latin or you were not educated. In America, education was practical and merit-based again, in the best interest of the students, as individuals and family members, whose parents were members of the free associations dedicated to education.

Associations were formed to serve every conceivable purpose, from knitting circles to professional advancement to the promotion of commerce and industry. Yet other societies were political, formed by persons of like minds, such as the Sons of Liberty, which was critically involved in the early stages of the Revolution in New England, and the Society of the Cincinnati, formed by veteran officers after the war, which was influential in the composition of the Constitution.

The associations of America, like family and faith, predated central government and were formed to free, connect and expand the interests of like-minded citizens. A spontaneous means of sharing in societies became influential in the formation of the nation. Each association was independent; each distinct, each created and sustained freely, needing no approval from any overlord or king. Nor were these societies subject to oppression on the basis of their distinct views, be those spiritual, commercial or political. Associations, then as now, formed another essential block in the bulwark of defense guarding our individual liberty.

## Property

The concept of property, as elucidated by the political philosopher and lawgiver, John Locke, also began with the individual: “Yet every man (and woman) has a property in his (her) own person; this nobody has any right to but themselves.” This exclamation of Locke’s was revolutionary in stipulating each person as his or her own property, and unassailable in that right; the idea became a cause of revolutions and the foundation of democratic constitutions—including our own. Also, from Locke, pertaining to property rights: “the labor of his (her) body and the work of his (her) hands we may say are properly his (their own).” For, “though the water running in the fountain be everyone’s, yet who can doubt, but that in the pitcher is (hers) his only who drew it out.”

The English view of property rights regarding land went back to the Magna Carta, which guaranteed that land could not be appropriated except by a judgment of one’s peers. Through this guarantee, the number of yeoman farms grew in England over centuries, creating its distinctive middle class. In addition, there was a timeless tradition in England that a man’s house was his “castle” defensible and rightly his own.

In America, to establish an individual’s possession, the land had to be cleared, houses built, and fields planted. Most colonists were small-scale farmers who controlled or owned only as much land as they could cultivate. A large German population that settled in Pennsylvania was reputed to be the best farmers in America, some planting corn “right up to the door” to bring in the best harvest. Property thus held brought out the best virtues of ownership: acquiring property, clearing it, cultivating it, expanding the holding, all required the virtues of temperance, frugality and industry, without which property does not stay in the same hands for long...

It must be noted that this description applies most accurately to the northern colonies where small, family-owned farms were the norm. In the South, larger landholders often indulged an unfortunate fondness for the aristocratic airs to which other colonists had bid good riddance. The ownership of slaves in conjunction with the large tracts of land worked by them cannot be ignored in the development of a New World “gentry” whose self-interest would eventually damage the nation to a degree almost unimaginable...until it happened.

Nearly a century before this looming disaster came to pass, however, at the gathering of the Continental Congress in 1774, a “Declaration and Resolves” was writ, the forerunner of our Declaration of Independence. It stated clearly that colonists were entitled to “life, liberty and property.” Thomas Jefferson later changed that wording to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”; nonetheless, the right to property is so basic to democracy that, as Samuel Adams pointed out, “to render rights and property precarious, tended to destroy both property and government.”

Property rights create a circular defense of individual liberty and law, for in order to protect one’s person, a base of property is undeniably helpful; to protect that base, one is supported by law; and by protecting the law, one protects the land—and oneself. So it is in America, and these truths are diametrically opposed to the idea of tyrants and their personal, universal ownership of everything—while leaving their subjects’ with no personal defenses and universally weak.

Consider one example from early America. The Pennsylvanians who were small landholders owned the means of independent survival, without the necessity of asking anyone for anything. Contrast this self-sufficiency with the situation of the Southern slave, who had to rely on his or her owner for every single necessity: a position of complete dependence immeasurably

worsened by the fact of absolute ownership. America's slaves were not their own property, even in their own bodies, but the property of another who profited by their labors.

Or contrast the American farmer to the Russian peasant, who likewise worked the land but was himself, along with his land and all his possessions, the personal property of the tsar. Nothing was his own, nothing was truly under his control; how then could a society develop in which citizens (a status that did not exist) successfully take charge of their own individual destinies, not to mention their collective destiny as a nation?

The stark difference of democracy and tyranny existed side by side in early America. Ninety percent of colonials were small independent landholders, each strong in their own cause. While ten percent of the southern population relied on the labors of slaves to maintain their excess lands, which weakened the slave population and weakened the slave holders as a population and the south as a whole—as it bore the deathly burden of slavery.

## Occupation

In Europe, for time immemorial, a person did what their father or mother did. If one's father was a blacksmith, his grandfather was a blacksmith and his great grandfather and his great, great, grandfather was a blacksmith—ad infinitum back to God's foundation of time, and the family even took the name—Smith! If one's mother was a seamstress of the manor, her girl was going to be a seamstress too. One's occupation was a confine forged through a long lineal descent of time. There was security in that; there was definition...and there was a prison. The only alternative for centuries was a life in the church—it provided alternative employment, but again within very narrow limits. In America, all of that opened out: there was an endless

horizon of breadth and heights open to every occupation and to every advancement.

In America, as with the Arthurian heroes, there was a grail to pursue, it was one's calling, whereby, one expanded into one's goals and interests and so expanded one's strengths. And, as with the grail, the hero must prove his faith in his own inner nature and needs to act upon it. Nowhere on earth had there been a place before or since where time, talent and opportunity gave birth to so many differing destinies, where so many individuals and their distinct strengths have been exercised. America's natural environment gave to "natural man" as Montesquieu predicted it would, as nature is: "just to all mankind, and repays them for their industry. She renders them industrious by annexing rewards in proportion to their labor." And the greatest of all rewards became possible: the fulfillment of one's own unique talents—and everyone has them, just as every diamond differs.

One's independent occupation also rendered the doer necessarily law abiding and sociable, as one's economic life literally depended on it. One's occupation also formed a further defense of one's person through one's working reputation: that is an asset no one else can steal. If a person is a good carpenter, that must, in some measure, be a good person. That is an asset you can literally take to the bank.

Through one's occupation a family and faith were supported, one's associations were supported—society itself was supported on the individual's taking responsibility for all of its elements, again freely—tithes and taxes weren't taken; in America—support was voluntarily given. And for that support, the elements of society became responsible to their supporters in an equal and reciprocal relation.



## Enterprise

The Dutch and English were the first to create functioning stock exchanges, which concentrated capital and loaned it out to fund government bond issues, trading expeditions, or capital-intensive manufacturing businesses. On the new continent, it was only a matter of time (and the reliable material security provided by the ready availability of property) before such arrangements would present opportunity to a people whose future appeared fairly boundless. Philadelphia, Boston, and New York all became colonial centers of capital. In New York, in 1653, Peter Stuyvesant built a structure around which auctioneers and dealers gathered to trade in shares of ventures. From there, capitalism took root and grew in America.

Put in the simplest terms, capitalism is democracy applied to an economy. One has an idea, which one shares with interested parties. Those parties display their interest and commitment to the idea in the form of purchasing a part of the risk and a part of the reward of the venture. They become capital investors who “own” a share of the venture and form a “corporation” of like investors. A board of representatives of the shareholders is “elected” and are answerable to the shareholders ever after. The person behind the venture has to hammer out the details of the project, and hire a pool of talents, who they believe can best aid in realizing the idea, thus one has to sell the idea to one’s employees, as well as to the investors, every person’s part in the venture is entirely voluntary.

Then with such backing from creators, shareholders, board members and employees, one must overcome all the obstacles inherent in the idea and in the ambience of the marketplace to make the venture profitable for all parties involved; who each enjoy a “share” of the success. It is a perfectly democratic process, all hands must agree to participate, while the board hears of any complaints from shareholders, employees or the

marketplace at large. In the marketplace, ultimately, “the people have their say” and decide whether a venture succeeds or fails—that is democratic! One votes with one’s pocketbook. No product ever made in America has ever been forcibly sold to anyone, the people decide what to buy. Henry Ford made the perfect car for the people, the people were not told to buy it, they were happy to make the purchase!

This manner of concentrating money has always been beneficial to democratic societies; corporations are after all, functioning democracies within democracies. As Alexander Hamilton put it: “When money is spread out, it is only money, when concentrated, it becomes capital.” Money is measured by addition and subtraction. Capital is measured by the effects of multiplication. When multiplied, dedicated Capital purchases assets, collects pools of talent, assembles raw materials, engages in manufacturing processes, advertises to the public, hires sales staffs and delivers product over vast distances—just money doesn’t do that. And if the corporation does not provide something the people want and will “invest” in, the product disappears, so does the corporation and so does the idea. This is how we end up with the Ford F150 pickup truck and the Pet Rock: it is up to the market to decide! It is democratic. If you wish to see the effects of tyranny on the economy of a society, look at Russian history 1917—1990 or look at it today—or look at Cuba or Venezuela or China—the subjects of tyranny are always starving, the one and the few at the top are always gorged—ask the Russian oligarchs!

There is a societal bonus to such an economy, again as Hamilton put it: “the merchant will be assiduous, the husbandman, laborious; the mechanic, active; and the manufacturer, industrious.” They must be so, or they go out of business. And in a broader societal sense, as Montesquieu notes: democracy “founded on commerce” will promote “frugality, economy,

moderation, labor, prudence, tranquility, order and regularity.” And its citizens will interact with “a politeness of morals” and will have an appreciation for and “a certain sentiment of exact justice.”

And what about an idea? An individual who has a viable idea can expand their person through the idea and increase their strengths and expand their identity through their goal’s attainment and their creations existence. It becomes a fruit of life. Rousseau called it “a grand spectacle to see man somehow emerge from nothing by his own efforts: dissipate by the light of his own reason, the darkness with which nature has enveloped him; raise himself above himself.” Enterprise allows that kind of rise.