

# The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom. Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson One Hundred Four

## To Be An American

### LESSON IDEA

To define Americanism and to show that it is not merely loyalty to the country of one's birth but rather a strong belief in a set of unique principles regarding the nature of government.

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**H**AVE YOU ever been accused of being a "superpatriot"? A flag waver? Did you look your accuser straight in the eye and say: "Yes, I wave the Stars and Stripes. Proudly. What flag do you wave?" Did you get an answer to that question? Probably not if you were talking to someone who had been taught to regard himself as a "citizen of the world" — a flag waver for world government.

Actually what such a sophisticate is trying to say is that all countries, in his opinion, are more or less alike; and he would rather be loyal to all of them than to any one of them. He might have a point if it were true that all countries are more or less alike, but they are not; Mr. Sophisticate has missed one of the most significant points of history.

America is not like England or France or Germany or China; we have no history of kings and queens, emperors and dynasties; we worship no royal palaces or jeweled crowns; we have never been loyal subjects begging for favors at the feet of princes. The men who launched America into nationhood had the courage to say to the world and its rulers: *We do not wish to copy any of you or any of*

*your governments. We believe you are wrong. We have a different idea about how a country should be run.*

Brave words, indeed, but also very hollow words if the new nation had fallen on her face trying her new idea. It was a gamble; or so the Old World of 1790 must have thought. After all, the place was little more than a wilderness; and its citizens were a miscellany of bull-headed individualists divided by different languages, customs, manners, and religious beliefs. Some were well-educated, some so ignorant that they could not write their own names. It seemed likely that so many different people with so many different beliefs and customs would only succeed in fighting among themselves to decide who was right about what. In the process they would probably pull their government apart. Those were the odds. And when that happened, France and Spain, who claimed territories in the south and west of the American continent, and England, who had planted her flag in the north and west, planned to move in on the dying nation and grab her land.

If that was the plan, it did not have a chance. For all the differences dividing those early Americans, there was one idea they agreed upon that was stronger: namely, that government was not to be their master, but their servant. While the citizens of other nations turned their faces toward their kings and emperors begging for favors and rights and privileges, Americans treated their President as if he were hired help. The attitude was not: *Please, Your Majesty, won't you take just a little of this tax burden from our backs?* but rather: *No, Mr. Presi-*

dent, you may not put any tax upon us — unless we give you permission.

Why do you suppose government was the master in many nations but only a servant in America? What would cause the American attitude to be so different? [Encourage discussion. If your family has studied Set I of The Family Heritage Series, they should remember this often emphasized point.]

The difference was hidden in these words from the Declaration of Independence:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights . . . .*

Think about that for a moment. If all men are created equal, why put one of them on a throne and treat him as if he were God's understudy on earth? If a man is a man (as opposed to a Heavenly Messenger posing as a human), then he should behave like a man instead of trying to impersonate the Ruler of the Universe. Americans firmly believed that men were created equal and that this precluded those who governed from pretending to be superhuman. They did not believe, however, that being *created* equal made all men the same in brain power or ambitions. Do you understand the difference between being created equal and being equal? [Ask each family member to explain the difference in his own words. Also, discuss equality before the law, explaining that all Americans are subject to the same legal restrictions. None are immune.]

**B**ASICALLY, being created equal means that the life of each person is just as sacred as the life of any other; and each has exactly the same natural God-given rights. An American does not have to tiptoe up to those who govern and beg, with his cap in hand, for the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These rights are his automatically because he was born into the world created by God. He did not have to say, as Englishmen said in the Magna Carta: *Please, Your Majesty, won't you sign this paper that says you will be kind enough not to behead us if we displease you?*

Americans never made the mistake of look-

ing at those who governed as the givers of rights — but only as the protectors of rights. What was given by God had to be protected from evil and greedy men; and it is to provide this protection service, said the American leaders, that “governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Just as the homeowners of Fimducfoo hire a police chief and a squad of patrolmen to protect them from the muggers, thieves, con men, murderers, and kidnapers who wander in and out of town, so Americans hired a president, legislators, and judges to protect their lives and freedom from the same assortment of criminals. If those first Americans had been saddled with a leftover king and queen when they were forming this nation, they undoubtedly would have told the royal couple that America was “hiring” and that if they thought they could handle the job of protecting everyone's natural rights they were free to apply. If not, they could find jobs elsewhere. It is doubtful that any American leader would have agreed to keep the royal family around as a figurehead, to be pampered, fed, clothed, entertained, and paraded through the streets churches, and government buildings for show purposes. Which is all many nations are currently doing with their kings and queens.

**T**O BE AN AMERICAN, then, means to believe that government should be your servant, not your master. That's fundamental. But how is this accomplished? Believing that it should be so is one thing; making it happen is another. For example, when you hire a police chief for Fimducfoo and give him money, power, and guns, how do you keep him from using all of those weapons against you? What is to keep him from making a deal with the criminals and attacking you? How do you keep the government you hire from forming a pact with thieves and killers and turning against you? “Government,” George Washington warned, “is not reason; it is not eloquence; it is force! Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master.”

The secret to hiring a police chief and keeping him working for you, or hiring a government and keeping it serving you, is to limit the power you give to either when you do the hiring. Include controls and correcting clauses. And put all the restrictions in

writing; publicize them widely, so that everyone everywhere knows the exact terms of the work agreement.

Do you know the name of the work agreement Americans made with their government in 1787? [*The Constitution.*] Do you know how it restricts government? [*Ask everyone for an opinion.*]

**M**OST OF THE NATIONS of the world have no written constitution or contract with their governments; of the few such contracts that do exist, most are meaningless and the remainder restrict the citizens rather than the government. That is, most national constitutions tell the people what they cannot do while giving the government permission to do just about anything it wants — except for a few items.

The American work agreement does the exact opposite. The Bill of Rights gives the people the right to do anything not specifically prohibited by law while telling government it can do nothing — except what it is specifically told to do in the Constitution. The U.S. Constitution cuts government power into pieces; it says that Congress can make laws, but cannot put them into effect; it states that the President can put laws into effect, but cannot make them; it decrees that the Supreme Court can decide whether or not laws are constitutional, but cannot make them or put them into effect. Everywhere there are checks and counter-checks. For example, the President is the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, but he cannot declare war — only Congress can do that. The President can make treaties with foreign nations — but each treaty must have the approval of two-thirds of the Senators present in Congress to become effective. At every turn there are restrictions and rules that limit the power of government.

The citizens of the Old World shook their heads when they first heard about the American Constitution and its limited government. “Too clumsy,” one said; “it will never work.” “Doomed to fail,” prophesied another. But they were wrong. It worked so well that an entire continent was explored, tamed, and transformed into the most prosperous nation on earth while other countries did little more than mark time.

What, we may ask, did making government our



GEORGE WASHINGTON described the nature of government accurately when he said it “is not reason; it is not eloquence; it is force! Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master.”

servant have to do with our prosperity? How does government affect wealth? The answer is simple when you think about it for a minute. Limiting government left people free to build, to invent, to explore, to compete, to learn, to experiment, and to fulfill their dreams without the heavy hand of bureaucracy to plan, control, and suppress human genius. The wonder machine called free enterprise operated in its own miraculous way, encouraging and rewarding those who worked hard while swiftly slapping down those who were cheats. When too many people made money-handling mistakes at the same time, free enterprise became ill or depressed. But when government kept its hands off, allowing the self-correcting devices of the system to have their way, healing was rapid.

**A**MERICANS were known the world over as people who enjoyed the kind of life that others dreamed of having. If you lived in America there was no limit to what you could do or be or have. It did not matter where you were born, or to whom, or who you knew, or how much money your family

had. You were free to go up the ladder of success as far and as fast as your brains and brawn and character could carry you. Government did not tie your hands or handicap you because of your birth or lineage. And the money system called free enterprise treated everyone equally. For these reasons, America became known as the land of opportunity and Americans were idolized as heroes. But to be an American — that is, to be a proud bearer of the title — means to champion the principles that make success possible, not to boast about how many television sets the country has. Do you understand the difference between principles and the practical effects of such principles? [*Emphasize the point that those who praise our nation in terms of how many cars her citizens own are talking about effects and ignoring the principles that make this abundance possible.*]

**A**LMOST TWO hundred years ago we entered a contest when we decided to build a nation on principles that other countries said would not work. We were the underdog among nations. We said that government should be our servant, not our master, that its powers should be strictly limited, that our rights were permanent because they had been given to us by God, and that free enterprise should be free to operate in its own ingenious way. The “world citizens” of 1790 said we were brash, know-nothing children doomed to fail. We insisted that we were right; and we proved it. We built a nation that was strong and prosperous, with more advantages to more people than other nations were able to provide. We won the contest because we stuck with principles that were right. Those principles still are right.

When you call yourself an American, say it proudly. Stand tall. Understand the principles that made this country great and become their champion. Remember, too, the greatness of the men who have claimed the title of American before you — John Adams, George Washington, Nathan Hale, Davy Crockett, Kit Carson, Eddie Rickenbacker. Remember their valor, bravery, courage, ingenuity, persistence, and independence. Set your own goals as high. Perhaps you can make the words of Lucille McBroom Crumley your creed for the months and years ahead:

## To Be An American

I wish to dream and build,  
To fail and to succeed.  
I want to earn my daily bread,  
Not have existence guaranteed.

I want to face life's challenges;  
Stand unafraid, erect and proud,  
To think for myself and to act  
American . . . free, unkept, unbowed.

I do not wish my freedom  
Nor my dignity to trade  
Or barter for a dole,  
The precedents my fathers made.

And so I face the world  
To boldly and unhumiliated say:  
“I will not bow nor cower  
For any master or tyrant's way.”

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## The Family Heritage Series

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For parents who wish to teach their children the true meaning of liberty, responsibility, and our Americanist heritage.

**The Family Heritage Series** is an outstanding series of weekly lessons for the home, written to stimulate interest and spark discussion about the legacy we have received.

**The Family Heritage Series** is for all parents with school-age children. It is sure to be valued by all Americans who participate in its Heritage Hour discussions, and would be especially welcomed as a gift.

**The Family Heritage Series** is published by the Movement To Restore Decency, a project of The John Birch Society. The annual subscription rate is twelve dollars for fifty-two lessons, mailed monthly. Individual lessons may be purchased in any quantity at four copies for one dollar. Address all orders and subscriptions to The John Birch Society, 395 Concord Avenue, Belmont, Massachusetts 02178. Wallis W. Wood, Editor.

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