

Senior Moments

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For Baby Boomers and Beyond

#19

The American Spirit

BY EDWIN J. FEULNER, PH.D.

Are America's best days behind her? Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, seems to think so. "The American dream is a myth," he wrote in a column. In a new USA Today/Gallup poll, nearly 6 in 10 disagreed with the idea that the next generation will live better than their parents do.

Negative thoughts like this are nothing new. It stands to reason that tough economic times will breed pessimism. Sometimes, though, we need to remind ourselves of the principles this country was founded on, and reconnect with the genius that created the United States of America, the only country founded not on identity, but on ideas.

That's what prompted my friend Brian Tracy to join me in writing "The American Spirit." As Brian explains in the introduction: "Today, millions of Americans are not clear about why the United States is the greatest country on earth and in all human history." And that's a shame.

Consider the phrase, "the American dream." The words themselves reveal something extraordinary. In all the history of man, there has been only one country with the word "dream" attached to it. There is no French Dream or Russian



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"Nothing so challenges the American spirit as tackling the biggest job on earth. Americans are stimulated by the big job; the Panama Canal, Boulder Dam, Grand Coulee, Lower Colorado River developments, and the tallest buildings in the world."

~ Lyndon B. Johnson ~

Dream or Chinese Dream. There is only the American dream, to which people worldwide aspire and have aspired since our founding. From 194 countries, people have come to America to pursue this dream.

In America, people care very much who you are. They care little about your background. In America, you can start from anywhere, with or without benefits and advantages from your family, and make your own way and your own life. At any time, you can decide to change and do something completely different. Your life is yours to chart.

This freedom to define your own destiny ultimately derives from the Judeo-Christian tradition. God created us in His own image, and just as God is free, so we are meant for freedom.

Government's purpose is not to impose some top-down vision of the good society on the rest of us, but to empower

men and women to use their God-given freedom as they choose.

This opportunity has its roots in our extraordinary founding in 1776. Having such freedom is more the exception than the rule throughout much of human history. The republican form of government had mostly been consigned to the history books since the fall of Rome. Monarchies had ruled the leading powers of the world for centuries.

By choosing a republic, where the governed control the government—not the other way around—the Founding Fathers displayed faith in the individual's ability to know better than any elected or appointed official what is best for himself and his family. That's why they created a Constitution that protects our God-given rights from government. The government does not grant those rights to us as citizens.

If you think we are granted our fundamental rights by the government, then you are more likely to seek additional favors from the government. If the government is the granter of all good things, what is to stop someone from thinking up more good things that could and should be granted by government?

Yet our government is not Santa Claus writ large, and our rights are not wish lists drawn up by eager tots on Christmas Eve. The Constitution does not grant us the wonderful rights we embrace; it handcuffs the government from infringing upon them. Or at least it used to be that way.

Some might be tempted to conclude that the American experiment has failed. I take a different view. We've faced tougher problems in the past, yet our optimism has prevailed.

There's no reason why we shouldn't overcome our current difficulties as well—provided we adhere to the virtues and values that constitute the American spirit.

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Look Who Turned 65 This Year!



Jay North (born 1951) began a prolific career as a child actor at the age of six, he became a household name during the early 1960s for his role as the well-meaning but mischievous Dennis Mitchell on the CBS situation comedy *Dennis the Menace*, based on the comic strip created by Hank Ketcham.

Dennis the Menace premiered on CBS on Sunday, October 4, 1959, and quickly became a hit with audiences. North was paid \$500 per episode, his strawberry red hair was bleached platinum blonde for the role, and the eight-year-old was instructed to "shave" a year off his age when speaking with the press.

Since the early 1990s, North has made occasional appearances on talk shows and in documentaries. In 1999, he concluded an interview by saying, "I am so happy that I was able to have such a positive impact on people's lives."

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