

The Common Ground

American Values and Ideals as expressed in Important Speeches



Tobias Wahler

with the collaboration of Benedikt Wahler

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Contents

	Page
A: Introduction: E pluribus unum	
B: Speeches - where values come to life	
I. Slavery: The Lincoln-Douglas Debates	
1. Stephen A. Douglas on Slavery	
2. Abraham Lincoln on Slavery	
3. Synopsis	
 II. Imperialism	
1. Albert J. Beveridge: "Salute to Imperialism"	
2. George Frisbie Hoar: "Against Imperialism"	
4. Synopsis	
 III. Welfare or Laisser-Faire	
1. Lyndon B. Johnson on Civil Rights and Social Policy	
2. Ronald Reagan: "A Time for Choosing"	
5. Synopsis	
 C: The Origin and Effect of American Values	
 D: Conclusion: The Common Ground	
 E: Appendix	

I believe in the supreme worth of the individual and in his right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness

I believe

that every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity, an obligation; every possession a duty

I believe

that the law was made for man and not man for the law; that government is the servant of the people and not their master

I believe

in the dignity of labor, whether with head or hand; that the world owes no man a living but that it owes every man an opportunity to make a living

I believe

that thrift is essential to well ordered living and that economy is a prime requisite for a sound financial structure, whether in government, business or personal affairs

I believe

that truth and justice are fundamental to an enduring social order

I believe

in the sacredness of a promise, that a man's word should be as good as his bond; that character - not wealth or power or position - is of supreme worth

I believe

that the rendering of useful service is the common duty of mankind and that only in the purifying fire of sacrifice is the dross of selfishness consumed and the greatness of the human soul set free

I believe

in an all-wise and all-loving god, named by whatever name, and that the individual's highest fulfillment, greatest happiness and widest usefulness are to be found in living in harmony with his will

I believe

that love is the greatest thing in the world; that it alone can overcome hate; that right can and will triumph over might

John D. Rockefeller Jr.

A: Introduction: E pluribus unum

E pluribus unum.

This motto of the American nation passes through millions of hands throughout the world day by day. As the rear side of the Great Seal of the United States it is featured on the one dollar bill and carries the belief of a nation of immigrants out into the world. There is no such thing as *the typical American*. It is diversity that is the most important feature of this nation. People who can trace their roots to just about any place on the face of the earth have assembled there since the times the first settlers set foot on what they hoped would be their new, their better home. Just as the faces of Americans we look into are a patchwork of the ethnic variety of those who reached the modern times' *promised land* over the generations since Jamestown's foundation, the *American way*, a culture, a set of beliefs, reflects the broad range of aspirations and convictions that washed ashore in the desired "land of the free"¹ with every single wave of "tired [...] poor and [...] huddled masses"². But the blending of all this diversity into one - this *e pluribus unum* - was achieved not so much by a "melting pot"³, where under high temperature and with brute force something new is being formed but by the free will of those entering the United States to embrace what this country offered them; the wealth of the land as well as the basic creeds it stood for.

As the concept of the United States as a *salad bowl* states, the different ethnic and religious groups, from Asian to African, from Baptists to Buddhists, have not abandoned their heritage; but they have not stopped at keeping the tradition, they all have taken a step ahead, voluntarily, consciously and intentionally becoming disciples of this new, secular religion of a democratic nation, calling themselves American.

More than 220 years ago, the birth certificate of the United States, the *Declaration of Independence* was signed. The new nation was born into a world of monarchies, of discoveries, of expanding empires, a world in which self-determination and the rule of justice was nothing else but a distant hope. As it grew larger and older it saw new ideologies emerge, masses stage revolutions, monarchs tumble, wars rage, genocides being committed. The challenges that arose with political and philosophical changes did not stop at America's borders. But it seems amazing at first glance that a community of global extent in its diversity was able to stand through this storm of change and survive. Other multi-cultural societies like the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia proved to be not as strong. Their collapse triggered ethnic atrocities, anarchic struggle and fundamentalism.

What is the bond they lacked and the USA have? Which is the *Common Ground* the world's oldest democracy is based on?

Why was there no revolution from underprivileged masses? What has been and still is the bond that - through all controversies that divided the nation - was strong enough to hold the citizens together, that kept the United States united? What is it that makes America the "Citty (sic!) upon a Hill"⁴, an example adopted in its basic outlines by ever more societies?

Which are the values US citizens have in mind when they call themselves - despite all differences in history, language and ethnicity - *Americans* ?

B: Speeches - where values come to life

To me speeches seem to be a good means of outlining what inspired and moved the nation in different times, under different circumstances, when faced with different challenges, under different governments.

In times of change and great movements society is often quaked in its fundamentals and menaced to disintegrate. These are times when important, decisive speeches are held in order to reinforce the nation's self-esteem and point out what would be the best solution to the problem. Therefore all the orations I selected have in common that they were given to indicate to the community what keeps them together, that is to say their basic principles, ideals and values. And those mentioned in the addresses do not express the feelings of only a few but, since they are to appeal a broad mass of Americans, they summarize the national thought. Given this, speeches, their content, their symbolism seem especially apt to provide a valid reflection of what values the American nation adheres to.

The speeches I chose are of great historical significance. They are representative for opinions that shaped the American nation and formed the national consciousness. Expansive discussions and abundant debates were held on the selected topics.

The chosen speeches were delivered in three different periods of time when it was essential to convince the people of one's point of view. These were times when conflicts divided the nation into two opposing camps and threatened to tear it apart. They span more than a century of United States' history, a century in which the population changed from rural pioneers to sub-urban employees. As the subject of this study are universal American values, the topics as well are to represent those conflicts that were exemplary for the changing society.

In order to display which the different opposed opinions on these subjects were, I took those that seemed to illustrate the vast gulf between the contrary views best, which means two speeches on each topic. My interpretation of these speeches will look into exploring different issues: How did the orators justify their positions, whom did they derive their considerations from? Which were their arguments and how did they try to influence the audience? Which were the principles and values they based their concepts on?

I. SLAVERY: The Lincoln-Douglas Debates

The slavery discussion in the middle of the 19th century is a good example to show how broad the gap between *pro* and *contra* can be. The antagonistic views were in such a remarkable contrast that the nation was about to split up. The conflict escalated on this topic when the American Civil War was triggered in 1861. The northern States of the USA wanted to abolish slavery while the south, which depended on it's continuance fought to maintain it. After the Yankees' victory in 1865 the Lincoln government abolished slavery forever with the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America.



blacks picking cotton in Mississippi at the turn of the century

Abraham Lincoln challenged Stephen A. Douglas for a seat in the Senate of the United States in 1858. A series of remarkable debates ensued. Between August and October of that same year Lincoln and Douglas met in public and debated seven times in seven different cities throughout Illinois. The debate I'm going to refer to was their *First Joint Debate* and was held in Ottawa, Illinois, on the 21st of August 1858.

Douglas accepted the challenge on the condition that he should open as well as close each debate. So he delivered his speech first, Abraham Lincoln replied to Douglas' utterances and in the end Douglas referred to his challenger's remarks in a short statement.

These are what have become known as *the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*. Robert St. John, a well-known historian in the early years of our century described them:

"The contest has been called the greatest 'intellectual wrestle' that has taken place in America. The speeches were reported throughout the country and the contest was followed with interest everywhere." ⁵

"The debates focused on one question only: slavery."⁶

1. Stephen A. Douglas on Slavery

Stephen A. Douglas, who was the candidate of the Democratic party for the United States Senate, was in contrast to Lincoln at this time already well-known as "a highly educated and brilliant speaker"⁷. His final ambition was the Presidency.

Douglas was an advocate of slavery and the idea of *popular sovereignty*, which meant that the free people living in a federal territory could decide for themselves if they wanted to have slavery or not. According to this idea, the basic decisions were to be taken by the states and not the federal government in Washington, D.C..⁸

Since Stephen A. Douglas would open and close the debate he had a slight advantage: He could heat up the masses against Lincoln, convince them of his opinion towards slavery first and show them that his Republican competitor would not tell them the truth. So he had a better starting point than Lincoln and a good chance of having his way concerning his idea of *popular sovereignty*.

Douglas refers to the *Founding Fathers* of the United States of America, those who (de-)signed the *Declaration of Independence* in 1776 - "Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Madison, Hamilton, Jay, and the great men of that day". He ensures that his theory of *popular sovereignty* is based "on the same principles on which [their] fathers made it".

One of these principles is *freedom*; and Douglas says that the principle of *freedom* also includes the *freedom* of each state "to do as it pleased on the subject of slavery", which is part of Douglas' *popular sovereignty*, too.

By quoting from a statement Lincoln previously made on the topic of slavery Douglas wants to demonstrate to the audience that his rival wishes to break with the *Constitution* and the conditions the "framers" of the United States gave, since Lincoln wants "uniformity among the institutions of the different States" but Douglas interprets that "[the] fathers intended that our institutions should differ".

Furthermore the Democrat leader is convinced that the *Founding Fathers* made the *Constitution of the United States of America* "on the white basis". And since Douglas is a defender of slavery - and therefore an enemy of negro rights - he sees his conception of *popular sovereignty* also suiting well with the "rights and privileges of citizenship" for he considers Negroes not to be citizens. Douglas is "opposed to negro citizenship in any and every form". The whites do have these rights but the blacks, an "inferior [race]" who are regarded as property and not as individuals, do not have these. And the

advocate of slavery is still convinced he behaves according to the principles and values of the *Constitution*. After all private property enjoys a special protection by the *Constitution* and the right to dispose of it is regarded as one of the basic rights guaranteed by that document.

To Lincoln's anti-slavery justifying quotation from the *Constitution* that "all men were created equal" Douglas objects that he does "not regard the negro as [his] equal". He even invokes "the Almighty, [...] the Supreme ruler of the Universe" who in his eyes "[never] intended the negro to be the equal of the white man".

Douglas wants to prove his and his theory's being best when he stresses he is a Democrat and "the great Democratic party [...] has proven itself to be the historic party of this nation [...] from the days of Jefferson until this period". And why should something or someone that has been right for almost one century, even rightful under the *Constitution*, and that is allegedly based on nation's founders be wrong now?

Moreover the Democrat claims that Lincoln keeps contradicting himself, does not keep to his word and changes his mind as he pleases. But in order to indicate that he keeps to his word Douglas uses a strong imagery:

"My principles are the same everywhere. [...] My principles will apply wherever the Constitution prevails and the American flag waves."

Douglas uses this expression as a clever means of certifying his bond with his nation. The "Constitution" as well as the "American flag" trigger strong feelings among the audience. They are the symbols that define the character of America, that stand for the rights, the *freedom* and the *equality* Americans enjoy - their *American Dream*.

In the end of his speech Douglas emphasizes:

"Under that principle we have become, from a feeble nation, the most powerful on the face of the earth, and if we only adhere to that principle, we can go forward increasing in territory, in power, in strength and in glory until the Republic of America shall be the North Star that shall guide the friends of freedom throughout the civilized world."

By referring to the principles the United States of America are based on Stephen A. Douglas appeals to the Americans' national identity. And since Douglas' ideas seem to fit with those of the *Constitution*, the *Declaration of Independence*, the *Founding Fathers* and even the "Almighty" Abraham Lincoln will have a hard job convincing the audience of his theories.

2. Abraham Lincoln on Slavery

Abraham Lincoln who was nominated by the Republicans for the United States Senate in 1858 was opposed to Douglas - in the election as well as in his views concerning slavery. Lincoln insisted that slavery was morally and legally wrong.



Abraham Lincoln
1809 - 1865

Although he was then "little known outside [Illinois]"⁹ the *Lincoln-Douglas Debates* "made him a national leader of the Republican Party and a contender for the presidential campaign in 1860"¹⁰ from which he emerged as the 16th, and one of the most famous President of the United States of America.

But back in 1858, although Douglas was sent to the Senate Lincoln was cheered at and celebrated by the people because they thought "he had the better of the argument"¹¹ in the debates. This contest was his breakthrough which evened the path to his

"administration of unparalleled greatness and permanent service. Perhaps no other presidential term has been chronicled with so much detail and painstaking research; and certainly no public career was ever more worthy of comprehensive study."¹²

When Abraham Lincoln stepped onto the stage he had a worse starting point than Douglas because he first had to reply to his antagonist's accusations before being able to start arguing on his views on the topic of slavery.¹³

Although "he had the better of the argument"¹⁴ Lincoln didn't use as much references to typical *American institutions, values or ideals* as Douglas did.

The Republican cites a speech he held in 1854 when he already emphasized that he "hate[s] [slavery] because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself". And this "injustice" is not supportable under the "Declaration of Independence".

Lincoln believes "that there is no right principle of action" against slavery and this will "[force] so many really good men amongst [them] into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty". But he also admits that he has "no prejudice against the Southern people" because of their attitude concerning slavery and "that it is very difficult to get rid of it". He neither sees a perfect solution to this *problem* since his

"own feelings will not admit of [...] [making] them politically and socially [the Americans'] equals".* But he does not want "slavery to go into [their] own free territory".

Since Lincoln suspects that the Democrats "have placed that institution on a new basis, which looks to the *perpetuity and nationalization of slavery*" he desires slavery in "the position in which our fathers originally placed it - restricting it from the new Territories where it had not gone, and legislating to cut off its source by the abrogation of the slave-trade thus putting the seal of legislation *against its spread*."

Now, I believe if we could arrest the spread, and place it where Washington, and Jefferson, and Madison placed it, it *would* be in the course of ultimate extinction, and the public mind *would*, as for eighty years past, believe that it was in the course of ultimate extinction. The crisis would be past and the institution might be let alone for a hundred years, if it should live so long, in the States where it exists, yet it would be going out of existence in the way best for both the black and the white races."

These words express Lincoln's viewpoint best. Moreover the Abolitionist insists that he is "fighting it upon these 'original principles' - fighting it in the Jeffersonian, Washingtonian, and Madisonian fashion".

As a reply to Douglas accusation that Lincoln wanted to trigger war between the slave-holding and the non-slaveholding States he states "that [he] claimed no right under the Constitution, nor had [he] any inclination, to enter into the slave States and interfere with the institutions of slavery".

Lincoln displays that the *Dred Scott decision*, a ruling of the Supreme Court in favor of property rights over slaves, says that "*under the Constitution*, the people cannot exclude slavery". He decries it as a misinterpretation of the intention of the *Founding Fathers* because here the right of some individuals to hold property interferes with the rights of many other individuals to be free, as the *Declaration of Independence* states is their *unalienable right*.

* Note: Although, some years later, when he did no longer need to fear hurting the Southerners' sentiments, because they were already waging war due to the quarrel over the issue of slavery, Lincoln did just that: he made African Americans equal before the law to whites, with the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation.

3. Synopsis

Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln hint at the same principles although they have absolutely antagonistic opinions on the subject of slavery. Their arguments are just as similar as their different views are opposed to each other. Both of them mention the *Constitution of the United States of America* and the *Declaration of Independence* as the source of their conceptions. It is *freedom* what both wish to bring the American nation. Lincoln as well as Douglas draw upon the *Founding Fathers* as the founders of their theories and invoke the *Almighty* as the one who allegedly shares their opinion on the subject of slavery.

II. Imperialism

"Imperialism is what happens when a strong state encounters a weak state, a soft frontier or a vacuum of power and uses its superior strength to dominate other people for its own purpose. Motives, rationales and mechanisms vary according to the culture [...] of the epoch,"¹⁵

describes historian and former adviser to President John F. Kennedy, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., this political phenomenon.

In the last years of the 19th century, before the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, new prophets came forth in the United States who demanded that the nation - for diverse motives - copy the policies of Britain or France and build up an empire, i.e. launch the policy of imperialism. The expanding economy demanded new markets for their products, the military demanded new bases, politicians and historians such as John Fiske and his idea of "manifest destiny" demanded that the American people fulfill its mission to elevate the world to civilization and freedom, and a society filled with concerns about inequality and new immigrants demanded an outlet for its inner quarrels.¹⁶

In 1898, with an ongoing rebellion against the Spanish rulers on Cuba, a U.S. war ship having been blown up in Havana, and the *yellow press* crying for revenge, the United State entered into war with Spain, and emerged with new territories overseas.

"The Spanish-American War [finally] ignited a heated debate about America's imperial ambition, particularly because it left the United States with overseas territories."¹⁷

1. Albert J. Beveridge: "Salute to Imperialism"

Albert J. Beveridge was a Republican Senator from Indiana and an ally to President William McKinley. The speeches he held in Congress and in public during his campaign for the Senate in 1898 "made him a major spokesman for annexing the Phillipines. [He] was cheered wildly by the hundreds who heard [him]."¹⁸

Beveridge supported what became known as *economic imperialism*, or, later *dollar diplomacy*.

Albert J. Beveridge delivered this address in 1900, in a period in which imperialism was the primary topic in all debates. It had to be decided whether the new territories should be annexed or left into independence. Beveridge's reasoning makes it evident that he was in favor of America's imperialistic behavior.¹⁹

Senator Beveridge shows already at the beginning of his speech the typical American, strong patriotism: "It is a noble land that god has given us" are his first words. He appeals to the American's national identity as he gives a brief outline of what characterizes America, "[the] greater England with a nobler destiny". And what is most important in his high-brow articulation: It is "a people imperial [...] by authority of their heaven-directed purposes". Here, Beveridge appeals to some central beliefs of the American people: their close connection to the *Almighty*, the notion of being *His chosen people and country*, of having a unique *destiny* set out by *Providence*.

By emphasizing that the United States of America are "a greater England" Beveridge hints on the one hand at the American's English *forefathers* and on the other hand he wants to imply that the United States should act according to their British *fathers'* imperialistic efforts.

The *e pluribus unum*-consciousness is also an American peculiarity and therefore it is no incident when Beveridge calls the American people "[a] chosen people" [...] "perpetually revitalized by the virile, man-producing workingfolk of all the earth".

The fact that Americans often refer to their *fathers* could be named *history-consciousness*; and hence it is no wonder that Beveridge uses the phrase "a history" as an anaphora at the beginning of a couple of successive subordinate clauses. He maintains that this history and its admirable actors, the *founding fathers*, and "a multiplying people [...] overran a continent in half a century" and now oblige their successors to follow their example, to "broaden [their] blessed reign [...] until the empire of [their] principles is established over the hearts of all mankind".

A meaningful symbol for the principle of *freedom*, which is mentioned by Beveridge, is the "Liberty Bell"; the bell that rang at *Independence Mall* in Philadelphia when the *Declaration of Independence* was signed in 1776. Furthermore Beveridge repeatedly draws upon "the [American] flag", "the flag of liberal government", "the Stars and Stripes of glory". "The flag" embodies all that is the United States, their principles, beliefs, institutions and people.

Moreover the Senator brings up references to *the Holy Bible*, which indicates on the enormous religiosity of the American people.

"Shall we be as the man who had one talent and hid it, or as he who had ten talents and used them until they grew to riches?"

According to Beveridge the American history is "a history of prophets [...] and of martyrs". Religion is an important *value* for Americans that drives their actions as individuals and as a nation, for, according to their mostly protestant views, secular success is a sign for divine benevolence.

Besides, America could take advantage of "new markets" because the "American trade shall be the imperial trade of the entire globe". Those who are against imperialism and this "divinely logical" venture, are declared to be "men [...] who take cowardice for their companion and self for their Deity".

Beveridge also knows that trying to convince the listeners of his point of view means that he has to prove his theories fit with those of the United States' *Founding Fathers*. And since he is a supporter of the Republican President of this time, William McKinley, he states:

"For William McKinley is continuing the policy that Jefferson began, Monroe continued, Seward advanced, Grant promoted, Harrison championed, and the growth of the republic has demanded."

A richness of American *values* can be found in Beveridge's closing of the oration when he seems to be trying to call them all back into the audience's mind:

"Fellow Americans, we are God's chosen people. Yonder at Bunker Hill and Yorktown his providence was above us. [...] Abraham Lincoln was his minister and his was the Altar of Freedom. [...] We cannot retreat from any soil where Providence has unfurled our banner; it is ours to save that soil for Liberty and Civilization. For Liberty and Civilization and God's promise fulfilled, the flag must henceforth be the symbol and the sign to all mankind - the flag!"

2. George Frisbie Hoar: "Against Imperialism"

George Frisbie Hoar was a Republican delegate from Massachusetts in the United States Senate at the end of the last century. When he voted against the annexation of the

Phillippines during the imperialism-debates he broke faith with the President and his party which was in favor of America's imperial spread.

Diane Ravitch states in her collection of famous speeches, "The American Reader":

"No one was more articulate in opposing imperialism than George Frisbie Hoar."²⁰

Hoar delivered his speech in the United States Senate in May 1902, more than three years after the Spanish-American War ended. The Senator's anti-imperialistic attitude did not keep the President McKinley from annexing the Phillipines²¹.

Goerge Frisbie Hoar, similar to Beveridge, brings forward characteristic American symbols from the beginning of his oration on. Already at that point, Hoar hints at his obedience of "the ideals of the fathers of the revolutionary time", which say

"that all men in political right were created equal; that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and are instituted to secure that equality; that every people [...] has the right to institute a government for itself and to lay its foundation on such principles and organize its powers in such form as to it and not to any other people shall seem most likely to effect its safety and happiness."

Hoar consciously uses this reference to the *Declaration of Independence*, which ought to trigger national fellowship and identity. Moreover he adds that "[ideals and sentimentalities] have made the United States the freest, strongest, richest of the nations of the world". Such a realization enforces the Americans' feeling that they found what they hoped to find in the *New World - freedom, security and prosperity* - and that their institutions have been vital to it.

Another typical American symbol that is mostly mentioned in combination with the ones named above and also used by Hoar immediately following his earlier statement, is -once more - "the American flag - beautiful as a flower to those who love it; terrible as a meteor to those who hate it". Concerning his anti-imperialistic disposition this comparison is to remind the American nation that the "flag" is "the emblem of peaceful supremacy" and not of imperialistic interventions. Only some moments later he accuses his imperialistic party-members, because they did not obey the importance of this sign and

"[made] the American flag in the eyes of a numerous people the emblem of sacrilege in Christian churches, and of the burning of human dwellings, and of horror of the water torture".

The *ideals* previously outlined are those of the *fathers* which, according to Hoar should be maintained. But in order to prove that the imperialism-supporters do not maintain the *ideals* of the *Founding Fathers*, Hoar now starts listing which is the imperialists interpretation of American *ideals*:

"One is that the flag shall never be hauled down where it has once floated. Another is that you will not talk or reason with a people with arms in their hands. Another is that sovereignty over an unwilling people may be bought with gold. And another is that sovereignty may be got by force of arms, as the booty of battle or the spoils of victory."

And these are just their *ideals*; in practice that meant already back then: "six hundred millions of treasure [wasted] [...] nearly ten thousand American lives [sacrificed and] provinces [devastated]...". Sacrificing these valuable and irreparable goods to the ambitions of a few politicians and merchants seems to be not fitting into the frame of values and ideals the founders of the nation set.

George Frisbie Hoar makes use of a catchy metaphor as he attempts to define the role of the imperialistic-favorable government of his time in comparison to the successive generations since the first settlers set foot on the *new continent*. Hoar suggests that

"we might erect here in the capital of the country a column to American Liberty" where "each generation [brings] its inscription, which should recite its own contribution to the great structure of which the column should be but the symbol".

All generations preceding Hoar's generation since the 16th are enlisted with their most honorable achievements. When it is the turn of Hoar's generation he is afraid of having to engrave:

"We repealed the Declaration of Independence. We changed the Monroe Doctrine from a doctrine of eternal righteousness and justice, resting on the consent of the governed, to a doctrine of brutal selfishness, looking only to our own advantage. [...] We vulgarized the American flag. We introduced perfidy into the practice of war. [...] We baffled the aspirations of a people for liberty."

George Frisbie Hoar sees such a pessimistic future for the United States lying ahead if the McKinley-government is to go on in its rigid imperialistic policies. But he attaches

that "the irrevocable step is not yet taken" and wishes that he will be able to declare one day:

"We, too, have kept the faith of the fathers. [...] We kept faith with our own history. We kept our national honor unsullied. The flag which we received without a rent we handed down without a stain."

3. Synopsis

For Albert J. Beveridge as well as for George Frisbie Hoar the *Stars and Stripes* flag has to be kept in honor; and according to them this can only be achieved by obeying their antagonistic theories.

America's *Founding Fathers* are important to both of them because they allegedly are the source of their opinions and conceptions. The glorious attainments of the *fathers* should be upheld and even extended, in terms of territory for Beveridge and in terms of honor for Hoar.

Both, Beveridge and Hoar regard the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution* as the base of their views on imperialism and the principles expressed in these documents as the ones they share and obey. The most remarkable principles are *freedom* and *liberty*.

"The Americans are God's chosen people" is what both tell their audience and religious belief is a principal *value* - only on what Americans are chosen for, they disagree.

III. Welfare or Laissez-Faire

When in October 1929 the New York stock market collapsed, and subsequently an economic crisis of a extension not yet know before evolved, Americans lost their faith in the economic system that had made it the richest nation on earth. Capitalism was no longer trusted to be able to provide for the general welfare. The policy of not interfering with the economy had been the basic creed of the governments of the 1920s, most notably that of Herbert Hoover, who called it "American individualism"²². Franklin Delano Roosevelt promised a *New Deal* to the country, a complex system of government actions in the markets in order to relieve the pains of the Great Depression. This was only the starting point of an ever-expanding set of government agencies, social policies and welfare programs enlarging the power of the national government in Washington, D.C.

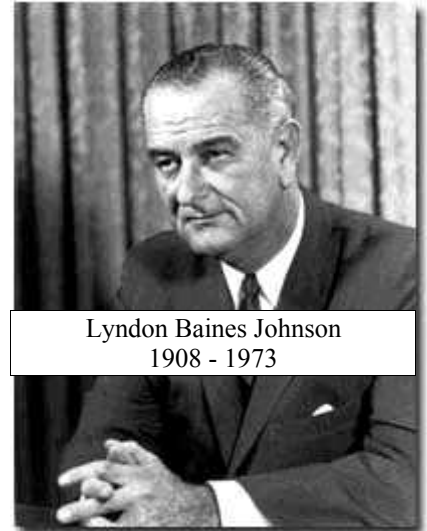
Furthermore, the issue of welfare and government regulation of the economy has proved to be the major fault line in the American two-party, separating Democrats and Republicans, resulting in an debate that endures still today.

1. Lyndon B. Johnson on Civil Rights and Social Policy

Just after John F. Kennedy had been assassinated in Dallas, Texas in November 1963, Lyndon Baines Johnson was sworn in as President of the United States. Having served as a teacher for unemployed youth during the Great Depression, and as a Democratic Senator from 1949 to 1961, he had concise objectives for his presidency. In combination with achieving the final political and legal equality of African Americans, he aimed at weaving a tight net of social security programs for all Americans. His concept of a *Great Society* was to be a better and more extensive *New Deal*.²³

But while fighting for these civil rights issues at home, Johnson enlarged the American stake in the war in Vietnam and thus lost the support of great parts of society. His concept finally failed.

Lyndon Baines Johnson made his "Voting Rights Address to Congress", in which he made his view towards social policies and the discrimination of the "Negro American" clear, before Congress on the 15th of March 1965.²⁴ _



Lyndon Baines Johnson
1908 - 1973

It is Lyndon B. Johnson's conviction that the government - "the Government of the greatest Nation on earth" - has to participate in its country's economy and take the governed by their hand. In doing so Johnson knows "that this is the only path to carry out the command of the Constitution". As a current example the Democratic President draws upon "the right [of blacks] to vote". Johnson reminds the whites, who often do not obey their African-American neighbors' rights, that

"we have all sworn an oath before God to support and to defend that Constitution. We must now act in obedience to that oath."

By using the expression "oath before God" Johnson hopes to trigger a stark feeling of obligation to keep to the principles of the *Constitution* among the listeners.

President Johnson sees in "the right to choose your own leader [...] the most basic right of all"; and since "every American citizen must have an equal right to vote" it is antagonistic to the *Constitution* that some "are kept from voting simply because they are Negroes". This is the point where Johnson wants to intervene. He does not want to downplay this disrespect of the *Constitution*, as Ronald Reagan might prevent most government interventions into public live, and passes a bill to guarantee the right of the Negro to vote. "[His] mission is at once the oldest and the most basic of this country: to right wrong, to do justice, to serve man."

Johnson shows reverence to the *Founding Fathers* and the American revolutionary time when he claims:

"At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord."

And so it is in Washington now, is what we seem to be hearing Johnson adding.

"This was the first nation in the history of the world to be founded with a purpose. The great phrases of that purpose still sound in every American heart,

North and South: ' All men are created equal ' - ' government by consent of the governed ' - ' give me liberty or give me death '."

Since these words describe the nation's purpose, there would be no purpose for the United States if the blacks were not treated equally to the whites; at least this seems to be what Johnson intended to utter.

Lyndon B. Johnson's Welfare policy shines through as he stresses that "[American Negroes'] cause must be [the whites'] cause too" since "this is one Nation". After having described how bad the African-Americans' situation is and what the government did against it, Johnson hints at his and his party's solution to the problem:

"We will guard against violence, knowing it strikes from our hands the very weapons which we seek - progress, obedience to law, and belief in American values. [...] [But] peace cannot be purchased at the cost of liberty."

As an advocate of Welfare policy Johnson reminds the audience that it is not enough "to open the city of hope to all people of all races" but

"to exercise [the] privileges [of an equal right] [...] it requires a decent home, and the chance to find a job, and the opportunity to escape from the clutches of poverty. Of course, people cannot contribute to the Nation if they are never taught to read or write, if their bodies are stunted from hunger, if their sickness goes untended, if their life is spent in hopeless poverty just drawing a welfare check".

Saying this he makes obvious that his Welfare policy, his *Great Society* program will be a solution to these problems. He mentions the issues of housing, labor, health and education that are part of his comprehensive social policy plan. For him, it is not enough that everyone is given their basic rights which the *Constitution* and the *Founding Fathers* had in mind. He claims that in order to be able to enjoy these rights, the government needs to intervene and spend money in the sectors named enumerated above. Only thus can it be secured, that the heritage of the *founders* is accessible for all.

Johnson summarizes his plans in a statement that seems to be drawn from of the bible:

"So we want to open the gates to opportunity. But we are also going to give all our people, black and white, the help that they need to walk through those gates."

His utterance implies a feeling of America being the *heaven*, the *promised land* with all its riches to which Johnson opens the gates; the majestic destination all want to reach one day. Like a good father, Johnson takes the Americans by the hand and leads them

there, to "the richest and most powerful country which ever occupied the globe". This needs to be done, since from his point of view, not all Americans are able to *pursue their happiness* on their own to the extent they wish to. Johnson's is a vision of a truly paternalistic government that is to give guidance to its citizens and protect them in all considerable ways.

Lyndon B. Johnson seems to feel chosen by *God* since he "[got] the chance to help" and now wants to impel his *disciples* "to share this task with [him]". He feels reassured of his position as he quotes a sentence inscribed "on the great seal of the United States": "God has favored our undertaking."

2. Ronald Reagan: "A Time for Choosing"

With the *New Deal's* and successive social legislation's growth of bureaucracy and power concentrated in the nation's capital, a movement soon emerged that defied these programs as being unconstitutional, un-American and socialist. Especially liberal economists and philosophers, like Milton Friedman, accused the social legislators that "every act of government intervention limits the area of individual freedom directly and threatens the preservation of freedom indirectly"²⁵. The Republican Party, and with them Ronald Reagan, took up that charge, especially as social security issues and government intervention in the marketplace approached their height during the Johnson Administration.

Ronald Reagan held this speech in 1964, 2 years before he was elected Governor of California and 27 years before he was elected the 40th President of the United States of America. He had only just left his career as an actor and entered politics with the Republican Party. This speech was part of a television appearance during the 1964 presidential election campaign. He spoke in favor of Republican candidate Barry Goldwater.²⁶

Reagan went *in medias res*.²⁷

"It's time we asked ourselves if we still know the freedoms intended for us by the Founding Fathers."

This statement already shows what is Reagan's major worry: "Freedom has never been so fragile, so close to slipping from our grasp."

Reagan sees *freedom* under threat because of the exuberant taxes which restrict the *freedom* of Americans to cope as they please with their earnings and because of the "government invasion of public power [which] is eventually an assault upon [any American's] own business", *freedom*s or *liberty*. He makes the people "recognize that [they] are just feeding the crocodile hoping he'll eat [them] last".

A typical American *value* is an inherently democratic system, a system of *self government* which "is still the newest, most unique idea in all the long history of man's relation to man". And according to the Republican Reagan it is essential in this "time for choosing" to "believe in our capacity for self government" and vote for the Republican party in the election, since the Democrats want to

"abandon the American Revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capital can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves".

By claiming this Reagan emphasizes that the Republicans want to preserve the *Founding Fathers'* heritage and "man's age-old dream - the maximum of individual freedom consistent with order", the basis of American society resting on that individual freedom. The Republican opinion is the same as the *fathers'* opinion, since "the Founding Fathers knew a government can't control the economy without controlling people".

In order to persuade his listeners of the Republican viewpoint he demonstrates that they even keep faith with the philosophical *forefathers*, e.g. Plutarch who "warned, 'the real destroyer of the liberties of the people is he who spreads among them bounties, donations and benefits' ". The supporter of *Laissez-Faire* thinks so, too, about the ambitions of the *Welfare-Democrats* which he has just unveiled to his audience. He defies their sinister plan as an request "to trade our freedom for the soup kitchen of the welfare state". That is no exchange worth making for any self-respecting American. Facing these options, he will *pursue his happiness* with his own means and not rely on government assistance.

"We need true tax reform that will at least make a start toward restoring for our children the American Dream that wealth is denied to no one, that each individual has the right to fly as high as his strength and ability will take him.

[...]

There can be no security anywhere in the free world if there is no fisical and economic stability within the United States."

These utterances of Reagan display the *national identity*, the *American Dream* of *liberty, freedom* and *equality*. The Americans regard themselves as the freest and strongest country on the face of the earth and as an unique example of equality, to be understood as equality of opportunity, secured by the *Constitution*.

Another significant aspect mentioned by Reagan is *destiny*, the attitude that the American nation is the people chosen by *God*, "the last best hope of man on earth". Ronald Reagan wishes to do "all that could be done [to] preserve [destiny] for our children." Of this task, the Republican is sure: he and his audience "have a rendezvous with destiny", their are tools in God's hand fulfilling His plan. Should he fail, Reagan would at least have had "the courage to do, what we know is morally right".

3. Synopsis

The friend of *Laisser-Faire* policy Reagan appeals to the same values as President Lyndon B. Johnson whose attitude, at least on social policy was opposed to Reagan's.

Both are convinced that America as a nation and they personally are chosen by *God*. They present themselves as sent by *Providence* in order to help the American people. This fact displays the American *self-esteem* and national *identity*.

Reagan as well as Johnson see their theories of social policy and their views towards economy in line with the principles of the *Founding Fathers*. They claim to continue the work of their forefathers and invoke them to take either one's side in advancing his cause.

The *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution* are guidelines for their acting and thoughts. It is where they derive the principles of their policies from and what they base their arguments on.

Johnson and Reagan are both advocates of *freedom, liberty* and *rights*. But the measures suggested by them in order to secure and promote these ideals against their respective opponents' attacks diverge a lot. Whereas Johnson considers government essential to uphold these values, Reagan interprets it as a threat to these values.

C: The Origin and Effect of American Values

With the arrival of the Pilgrims and entire waves of others who sought religious freedom in the New World, the first pillar of the temple of American values had been erected. From the Protestant ideal of individual responsibility facing god, a notion of the individual as the essential foundation of any society emerged. Not the freedom of any group or some concept of the greatest welfare of the greatest number, but the freedom of any and every individual was the benchmark by which to measure the virtue of any form of government. The conviction of those groups that had broken away from mainstream-christianity to be God's chosen people over time transformed into the belief of any American that his country was blessed by the *Almighty*. But this meant as well that the United States, having a *divine destiny*, bore special responsibility for it's behavior and condition - after all it was to serve as an example for the entire world.

When the 13 English colonies sought to break away from the empire, their political and intellectual leaders were looking for principles to base their confederation on. They were mainly influenced by the philosophy of the Age of Enlightenment and the Scottish moral philosophy that maintained that making use of one's reason was the best way to free oneself from the chains of oppression, armed conflict and poverty. But whereas in most parts of history, philosophy is far ahead of its time and a huge gap exists between the first appearance of an idea and its implementation in politics, the American Revolution served as a laboratory for the application of the latest philosophical innovations. The *Declaration of Independence* drafted by Thomas Jefferson and the *Constitution* mainly conceived by James Madison, express the spirit and the principles of the Enlightenment: all just power was to be derived from the consent of those who are subjected to this power; all men were to be *equal before the law* and possess certain *unalienable rights*, such as *life, liberty* and the *pursuit of happiness*.²⁸ To prevent any possible concentration of power, a system of checks and balances was introduced and a federal organization of the state was to prevail.

The German historian Jürgen Heideking underlines the enduring effect of these documents:

"Durch die Fähigkeit Jeffersons, komplexe Sachverhalte und Ideen in wenige, mitreißende Sätze zu verdichten, gewann die Unabhängigkeitserklärung über

ihre praktische Bedeutung hinaus den Charakter eines politisch-philosophischen Epochendokuments"²⁹.

Although over the ages since 1776, other philosophies have found followers as well in the United States, a democratic society based on *individual freedom* is not only up to date still in our times, but continues to be an idea that can excite oppressed people and scare their governments.

together, these two main streams of *ideals*, the Protestant heritage and the heritage of a philosophy of *freedom* and democracy were the thread in the patchwork of American society. Soon after the Revolutionary War, American *values* found their expression in a *national* or *civil religion*.

"Als identitätsstiftende Symbole eigneten sich besonders gut die Gründungsdokumente Unabhängigkeitserklärung und Verfassung [...]. Das Bekenntnis zu den Prinzipien der Revolution nahm hier eine quasi-religiösen Charakter an."³⁰

Over time, the reverence of the nation's history as a crusade for *American values* expanded. The expansion of the territory of the Union across the continent was interpreted as a manifestation of the United States' *divine destiny*. Abraham Lincoln was depicted as a martyr for the principles of the *Founding Fathers*, the *flag* of the United States, the *Stars and Stripes*, and the national anthem, *The Star-Spangled Banner* became symbols, appropriate to build a national identity for a people of different heritage.³¹ On special holidays, Washington's Birthday, the 4th of July, Memorial Day, and more recently Martin Luther King day, the nation came together to commemorate this history they had either experienced themselves or accepted as a tradition in which to place themselves.

The integration into the new community was facilitated as poets and authors transformed the notion of "America" into one of moral and religious instead of territorial or ethnic dimensions and praised *American democracy* as the fulfillment of a divine promise to all mankind.³² Constant repetition of what was considered American helped to integrate new arrivals into the American mainstream. Especially the introduction of an obligatory "Pledge of Allegiance" in schools at the turn of the century helped shape the minds of second generation immigrants. Every morning they had to recite:

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States and to the Republic for

which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."³³

This summary of American values gave Americans and immigrants alike a concise understanding what their nation stood for and which principles they were to adhere to.

Up to now, the *identity* of any American is deeply connected to what is seen as the basic *American values*. They are guidelines for his own actions and those of his nation. We can recognize them even in the current impeachment trial of President William J. Clinton in the United States Senate. Both, the defense as well as the prosecution, Democrats as well as Republicans refer to the *Founding Fathers* and their institutions, to the *values of equality before the law, liberty and justice* and the history of the United States to support their case. It is - like so often before - an issue that divides the nation, but -like so often before- the gap between both sides is one of interpretation of the same, their common American values.

D: Conclusion: The Common Ground

As we have seen in the covered topics and the excerpts from the various speeches, the orators that tried to make their case in front of the American people have all referred to the same *ideals*; their argumentation follows certain lines that seem to be typical for American rhetoric.

The *Founding Fathers* are the moral authority that is cited to evoke a sense of righteousness of one's cause. If the project matches with their spirit, then it is morally and legally right and should be put into action, the common argumentation goes.

The institutions created by the *Founding Fathers*, or sometimes called *framers* for they designed the legal and political frame in which American public life takes place, are the benchmarks set for measuring whether Americans are still *keeping that faith* which their *forefathers* gave their nation.

The *Constitution* as the document that paves the legal ground on which the nation walks and the *Declaration of Independence*, expressing the fundamental *American freedoms of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness* are to the United States what the Bible and the Ten Commandments were to the people of Israel. Documents that as time went by have acquired an almost holy status as the legendary cornerstones of the building that is the American nation.

Those who laid these cornerstones, Jefferson, Washington, Madison, Hamilton and many others are to Americans like Prometheus who brought light to mankind. In this religion of *liberty*, American history is seen as consisting of a line of prophets that succeeded the *Founding Fathers* and led their people over battlegrounds and through tumultuous times into a future, which Americans were certain was always bright.

This certainty is derived from the basic belief that the United States is the modern age promised land for those who seek *freedom*, the new Jerusalem, the city upon a hill of the Puritans, "the last best hope of man on earth"³⁴ as Ronald Reagan put it. Starting with the *Declaration of Independence* and the Revolutionary War, Americans see their history as a proof that they really are *a chosen people*, for whom *God* (or *Providence* to some) has set out a unique and glorious *destiny* expanding their *ideals* and *liberty* over the continent, over foreign territories, to ever new frontiers.

All this is the *Common Ground* of Americans, of a nation that unlike any other has stood together through the storms of time despite its basic diversity. Their *values*, their institutions, their beliefs, their history of *freedom* unite this truly global community and give them a strong feeling of belonging together, of being a nation.

The *Common Values* and convictions and the documents reflecting them proved to be tools good enough to fit the many different tasks that arose with changes in society, industry and policy. They provided a base broad enough for any quarrel, all problems could be resolved within this frame. Interpretation of the meaning of these *values* in changing context made it possible to keep the framework set over 220 years ago in times of radical change in public opinion, focus of policies, economic and military matters.

The *Common Ground* in American society was the social glue that kept together what fate and free will had brought together in this vast country. It transformed a diverse group of people into a nation and gave it an *identity* that made it stand up proudly and influence every part of the globe.

America has shown us, what a peaceful future world might look like. So, we could quote Winston Churchill and say that this "is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."³⁵

- ¹ cf., Key, Francis Scott, "The Star-Spangled Banner", in Ravitch, Diane (ed.), "The American...", p. 45
- ² cf., Lazarus, Emma, "The New Colossus", in Ravitch, Diane (ed.), "The American ...", p. 175
- ³ cf., Friebel, Isolde & Händel, Heinrich (eds.), "Britain - USA...", p. 97ff
- ⁴ cf., Winthrop, John, "City Upon a Hill", in Paterson, Thomas G. (ed.), "Major Problems...-Volume I..." p. 29
- ⁵ cf., St. John, Robert & Noonan, Raymond (eds.), "Landmarks of Liberty - ...", p. 153
- ⁶ cf., Ravitch, Diane (ed.), "The American...", p. 123
- ⁷ cf., St. John, Robert & Noonan, Raymond (eds.), "Landmarks of Liberty - ...", p. 153
- ⁸ the quotations in the following paragraph are all taken from
URL: <http://www.founding.com/library/lbody.cfm?id=331&parent=64>
- ⁹ cf., "The Lincoln-Douglas Debates", in Ravitch, Diane (ed.), "The American...", p.123
- ¹⁰ cf., "The Lincoln-Douglas Debates", in Ravitch, Diane (ed.), "The American...", p.123
- ¹¹ cf., St. John, Robert & Noonan, Raymond (eds.), "Landmarks of Liberty - ...", p. 154
- ¹² cf., St. John, Robert & Noonan, Raymond (eds.), "Landmarks of Liberty - ...", p. 318
- ¹³ the quotations in the following paragraph are all (except for 15) taken from
URL: <http://www.founding.com/library/lbody.cfm?id=331&parent=64>
- ¹⁴ cf., St. John, Robert & Noonan, Raymond (eds.), "Landmarks of Liberty - ...", p. 154
- ¹⁵ cf., Schlesinger, A. Jr., "Seeking...", in Paterson, Thomas G. (ed.), "Major Problems...-Volume I...", p. 25
- ¹⁶ cf., Heideking, Jürgen, "Geschichte der USA", p. 231ff
- ¹⁷ cf., Ravitch, Diane (ed.), "The American...", p.193
- ¹⁸ cf. http://douglass.speech.nwu.edu/beve_a28.htm
- ¹⁹ the quotations in the following paragraph are all taken from
Beveridge, Albert J., "Salute to Imperialism", in Paterson, Thomas G. (ed.), "Major Problems...-Volume I...", p. 389-391
- ²⁰ cf., Ravitch, Diane (ed.), "The American...", p.193
- ²¹ the quotations in the following paragraph are all taken from
Hoar, George Frisbie, "Against Imperialism", in Ravitch, Diane (ed.), "The American...", p. 193-196
- ²² cf., Hoover, Herbert, "The American System of Self-Government", in Ravitch, Diane (ed.), "The American..." , p. 260ff
- ²³ cf., Heideking, Jürgen, "Geschichte der USA", p. 397
- ²⁴ the quotations in the following paragraph are all taken from
URL: <http://www.hpol.org/lbj/voting/>
- ²⁵ cf., Friedman, Milton, "Capitalism and Freedom", p. 32
- ²⁶ cf., Buttie, Robert, Pius, "Ronald Reagan, The Great Communicator"
URL: <http://digidesk.p52s.hioslo.no/niwg/rreagan.htm>
- ²⁷ the quotations in the following paragraph are all taken from
URL: <http://www.founding.com/library/lbody.cfm?id=487&parent=20>
- ²⁸ for the last paragraph, cf. Heideking, Jürgen, "Geschichte der USA", p. 41f
- ²⁹ cf., Heideking, Jürgen, "Geschichte der USA", p. 42
- ³⁰ cf., Heideking, Jürgen, "Geschichte der USA", p. 75
- ³¹ cf., Heideking, Jürgen, "Geschichte der USA", p. 98
- ³² cf., Heideking, Jürgen, "Geschichte der USA", p. 175
- ³³ cf., Ravitch, Diane, "The American Reader", p. 182
- ³⁴ cf., Reagan, Ronald, "A Time for Choosing"
URL: <http://www.founding.com/library/lbody.cfm?id=487&parent=20>
- ³⁵ cf., Johnson, Lyndon B. "Commencement Address..."
URL: <http://www.hpol.org/lbj/civil-rights/>