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# The Promise of America\*

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Two centuries, three decades, and two years ago, our forebears made a promise. They declared “**America**” to be “**Free and Independent States.**” Born of the spiritual inspiration of privileged minds like Adams, Washington and Jefferson, and anointed by the perspiration of nameless peasant backs, America affirmed that all of her people are created equal: among their inalienable rights are “**life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.**” She insured the promise with a Constitution, making “**We the People**” constitutionally-mandated policy-makers. She saw her family divided in a bloody Civil War and heard Lincoln reaffirm the promise: “**That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from this earth.**”

In bonds of servitude and slavery, with “**a Passion for Freedom**”—cultural, economic and political—artisans and paupers from Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas—came to exact that promise. Their icon was hope, their sacrament was work, their relic a battered shovel. They worked ‘til they fell. And slept ‘til they worked.

They raised cotton and wheat under sun, and tobacco under gauze. They carved black coal out of hard earth and molten ingots out of white fire! They pounded hammers to build homes and sledges to lay track.

They harnessed up to the plow at birth and they died on untilled ground—leaving only traces for their progeny. They danced “**squares**” and “**steps**” and “**horas**” to live “**now,**” and sang spirituals to set their children free. They chanted “**Our Fathers**” and “**Hail Marys**” for their own freedom in an afterlife that bettered theirs here on earth.

They were long on reality and short on fantasy.

They were efficient working machines. Input was minimal. Output was maximum.

They pursued America’s promise. It was a bigger promise than their minds could comprehend. Servant or free, their children could have more than they. They sacrificed with this thought indelibly impressed upon their minds.

They scratched in the pits and the vats. They sweated in the galleys and the holds. They fought in the holes and trenches.

They died with iron in their hands, steel in their guts, and the promise on their minds.

They knew neither better nor worse. They gave all they could conceive within the boundaries of their intellect. They gave themselves.

They passed on the promise.

Some generations ago, we were the promise. We were the value for which our forebears paid with their toil and tears. We were the product of the anvil, the test-tube and the sextant.

They never fully understood the promise. But they passed it on anyway. All that they knew was that it was more than they had. Something “better” for the kids! A “**piece of the action**” they never got. Shingled homes on 40' x 100' lots! And schools with teachers that would pull off the miracle of the promise! They gave us what they knew. And much more than they received!

Born of privilege, we were the new America.

Shaped by progressively improving economic and social circumstance, we were “**the chosen ones.**” Our expectancies far surpassed our merits. Our rewards far outweighed our just desserts.

But we were strong and confident with the gifts of our progenitors.

We followed dutifully in their tracks. We walked directionfully toward the goals to which they pointed. We sought fulfillment in our increasing achievement.

Stoically, we weathered the Great Depression that threatened our promise.

Proudly, we waged the Great Wars in defense of our promise.

Confidently, we chose and were chosen to bring the blossom to America’s promise.

Given its vast resources of minerals and energy, its reservoir of indomitable human talent, and its incessant industrial technology, we were not to be denied. We were bound to fulfill the destiny of the greatness of America that was ours.

Then, in 1945, at Hiroshima, the industrial technology of Western man climaxed in an orgiastic cloud of fire.

Conflicted by our motives, we were awed by its potency and paralyzed by its devastation.

Shorn of our innocence, we would never be the same.

We pondered our morality. We questioned whether this is what our system and its technology were designed to do—destroy themselves? We pondered whether such a system could ever produce any promise.

Was the promise a truth revealed by God to release the substance of our minds and souls to fulfillment?

Or was the promise a myth designed by devils to veil the iron hands and hearts of our apocalypse?

We wandered—not in the white desert of Moses leading to the Promised Land—but in the land of Cain falling into atomic ashes of oblivion.

We have lived like patients in a hospital called “**Earth.**” To us, the only thing more terrifying than institutionalization was its abandonment.

There were those who sought to set us free. And we were inclined to follow—hesitantly. But in our torment and revulsion with our own evil, we did not know who they really were. Our minds were not free and so our bodies stayed. We revere them more in memory than we did in their merciful authenticity.

We heard the promise reaffirmed in the youthful exuberance of President John F. Kennedy. He offered—not directions—but challenges. He said: “*Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.*”

We let him die on the streets for his country. Because we vacillated!

We saw the promise re-lived in the eloquent words and life of Dr. Martin Luther King. He had a dream of equality of opportunity for all peoples. We saw him lead a non-violent army up the mountain to pursue that dream.

And never return. Because we faltered!

We saw the promise fulfilled in the passion of President Ronald Reagan who sought to “*tear down the walls*” that prevented freedom for all peoples.

We listened but did not “*hear*” him because we were too busy building our own walls! Perhaps we can hear him again, “*Tear down this wall...!*”

We long for the return of these brave leaders. In imagery, at least, we matched our lost innocence with their lost lives.

They dared to surmount their fears—and ours—to confront us with a choice. We declined to choose and yet regret its loss. We live with the consequences of our indecision.

We long for the heroes to fill their shoes. Yet cannot distinguish the aspirants for their makeup and rouge.

And what would we do if they truly reappeared? Having done so once, would we let them die again? Our liberty to choose, numbed in an orgy of despair.

Shaken, we have abandoned the human frontiers.

Directionless, we have regressed to ways more familiar to us.

We have returned to worship at the shrine of endless economic progress.

We have studied the Bible of Opportunity and drawn only from its pages to resolve the crises of our time.

We have purchased everything—even absolution—on the installment plan.

## The Destruct System

With a faint disclaimer, we have built, like Phoenix out of the ashes of Hiroshima, a Destruct System so potent that we can guarantee wiping out six billion people in one day.

And still we cannot guarantee the constructive growth and development of one child in twenty years!

We bring so much technology to bear in order to develop a Destruct System and virtually none at all to develop a Construct System. We are more terrified by the possibility of the development and culmination of a Construct System than we are by the certainty of the ugly climax of the Destruct System.

Is man, in fact, the evil genius of his own destruction?

Or can he rise above his evil to fulfill his humanity?

We have emptied once-full promises. We have hollowed what was hallowed.

Perhaps in our pursuit of the promise, we took much more than we earned.

Perhaps in our quest for life, we equated consumption with fulfillment.

Perhaps with the gift of liberty, we confused freedom with privilege.

Perhaps in our pursuit of happiness, we mistook independence for responsibility.

Or maybe we simply have not been reared to adulthood. To exchange the “**me**” for “**we.**”

To understand that we exist on a fragile spacecraft called “**Earth**” only by the grace of forces much greater than ours.

To acknowledge that our relative abilities to obtain and use them notwithstanding, the resources of that spacecraft are limited. And that we are all dependent upon its tenuous supply of air and water and soil. And, of necessity, are all committed for our own safety to its security and peace; preserved from extinction only by the love we give each other and the work we give our home.

To comprehend that these physical limits dictate that we conceive of ourselves as a “**family of man.**”

We have not fulfilled the promise! And the legacy of broken homes and skill-less schools that we leave our children testifies solemnly to this. Four out of five of our children will lack the skills that they need to function effectively in their worlds. They will be victims and perpetrators of injustice and crime, of racism, sexism, agism, institutionalization, mental illness, vocational maladjustment, marital unhappiness, family dysfunctionality, and many other expressions of profound failure.

Our children will not be healthy enough to live the promised life. Millions of our children will attempt suicide and tens of thousands will succeed.

Our children will not be intelligent enough to exercise the promised liberty. Two-thirds of our urban school students will be functionally illiterate.

Our children will not be productive enough to pursue the promised happiness. We will “**outsource**” our routinized tasks and delude ourselves with the benefits of “multi-tasking” as our per-man-hour productivity drops from first to last among the industrialized nations of this world.

Our children will not have the opportunity and the skills to experience the promised equality between people within our nation and within people between nations. Many times more blacks than whites will die in infancy. Single-digit percentages of our leading policy makers will be women. More than half of the world’s population will exist on less than two dollars per day. And nearly one-half of these will exist—or not—on nothing! They know nothing of our promise.

In our desperate flight from equality of opportunity, we have abandoned our cities and, with them, public education, the one institution that made the promise possible. Where the cities and public education once converged to transform our lower class into middle class, they now retreat to provide only dwellings and “**schools for paupers,**” where children learn only enough to carry out the orders of “the man,” as a two-class society of rich and poor once again emerges.

We are perched precariously on the brink of bankruptcy—moral and economic.

We have contemplated dictatorship in exchange for stability. And through no fault of our own—but the vigilance of one night guard—we were saved from that choice. We will consider it again.

Our oil supplies are curtailed. And with “the last dinner of the dinosaurs,” our fragile national and international commitments, indicating not a physical energy crisis but a personal integrity crisis.

And with it, we grab all that we can on the way down, causing wealth for the upper class, inflation for the middle class, and depression for the lower class.

We have grown old before we are young. Our intelligence regresses before it has actualized.

We have made it all the way to the moon and back. And still do not understand that the Destruct System begins with us. We are not so much its helpless victims as we are its active perpetrators.

Not on a roasted island. But in our daily compromise do we make the love of life and liberty a lie; and raise the idol of greed and injustice to replace the promise of our country.

Not out in virgin space. But in our daily lives—with our children and family, our students and teachers, our clients, co-workers, and employers, with ourselves—do we build the little bombs from which the big are made.



## The Construct System

Climbing the same mountains that her leaders confronted, America became the greatest Multicultural Society in the history of humankind.

Cradled in an Agrarian Society, she built upon theories of Liberal Economic Enterprise and created the greatest Industrial Society in the world.

Liberated from tyrannical monarchy, America imported the practices of Political Participation and generated the most Democratic Society ever.

Inspired by her own accomplishments, America approached actualizing **The Freedom Functions:**

- **Free Enterprise Economics,**
- **Direct Participative Governance,**
- **Collaborative Cultural Relating.**

In her maturity, America exemplified “**The Freedom Functions,**” going to heights that no peoples in history had ever gone. And then retreated!

Having experienced the largesse of **Free Enterprise**, she was threatened by the loss of stability, and, thus, retreated to command economics.

Having prospered with **Participative Governance**, she was threatened by the loss of control, and, thus, retreated to authoritarianism.

Having viewed the benefits of **Cultural Relating**, she was intimidated by the loss of independency, and, thus, regressed to competitiveness.

America had risen to heights where no nation had ever gone—and then retreated to seek sanctuary in the consensus of conforming systems.

Abandoning leadership, America—the torchbearer of freedom—the beacon of hope for the world, now became one of its detractors.

Faced with the requirements of freedom, people were threatened by their own insecurities. They would rather face the promised security of stability than the autonomy insecurity of freedom. Peasants again, they would rather accept their lots than reach their potential.

Yet deep inside of each of us the promise of America persevered. Buried by the pain of loss, threatened by the fear of final failure, intimidated by the success of psycho-pathology, the promise lingered. Imprisoned by the same walls that protected us, we were more terrified of release than of continued confinement.

The promise was simple. Its implications are profound.

Wrought by the minds of men out of the depths of what was not, it had neither precedence in the history of man nor a science for his future.

It was a promise for what could be. It left to us the development of a technology for what is.

Technology, the science of the practical. Yes, the same technology that produced the Destruct System could be used to build a Construct System. The only differences are the value judgments that we make. To be sure, there can be no Construct System without technology. The gap between the constructive motives of our forebears and the delivery of the promise can be bridged only by technologies—human as well as information and mechanical.

Either we decide that this Construct System is worth fighting for, or we demean the contributions of ancestors who fought bravely for far less; denying them the flowering of human efforts that rationalize their fight.

For without our courage, theirs was in vain, and without our commitment, theirs will never culminate.

Worse still, it was not what was left to us but what we leave that will decide. Whether we—by default—accept the promise and mark it “**paid in full.**” Or whether we pass it on, marked full measure given for full received, with a rider attached, signifying that the heights of humanity have not yet been reached.

We need only people and programs to do so.

In these we are twice blessed!

By past and present!

## Transition to Future

The promise was committed to man's realization of his physical person—to discover the resources of private energy that flow from inside—and the reservoirs of public energy that are pulled, like the moon the tides, by the excitement of his honest investment of himself in the outside.

The promise was dedicated to man's actualization of his emotional being—to discover that personal truths alone prevail—to recognize that interpersonal truths alone allows man to share in beauty and so be beautiful.

The promise was pledged to man's fulfillment of the uniqueness of his humanity—the intellect that allows him to go places that he has not been—that allows him to survive his biological nature and grow in his spiritual soul.

Our forebears made a promise and paid with their lives to pass it on to us. Where we fumbled it in the darkness of our fears, we now retrieve it in the light of **Human Processing Technologies**. Processing skills that bridge the gap from promise to delivery. Processing skills that constitute **Human Technologies** for human effectiveness. Where people are both ends and means. **Human Technologies** that find efficiency and effectiveness in functional integrations of biological, operational and mechanistic views of human behavior. **Human Technologies** that find energy and vitality in human values and the achievement of environmental requirements. And, thus, rationalize our fleeting moment in the universe.

Where there was iron and the alphabet, now there are **Human Technologies**.

Once again, the choice is ours. To fulfill the promise of the past in the development of a Construct System that will change not just the face of the world but the substance of its people. Or to trigger the Destruct System that has been poised for so long in anticipation of its final moment!

And if we choose to carry the promise forward, let us do so with a commitment in our right hand and a specialty skill in our left.

And when it comes to be, as ever, that we, too, cease to exist, let us pass on the promise inscribed that those who passed it to us knew why they died. And that we, the promised, knew why we lived!

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