

CHAPTER I



INDIVIDUALISM AND ITS PRACTICAL EFFECTS

I A Major American Characteristic, Individualism

Americans could practice in large numbers the ideal of the free individual, the man who made himself what he was. They did not have to live out predetermined lives as they would have had to do in Europe.¹

Historically it was Europeans who came to America to be Americans. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Europeans left their home lands, which had been for centuries in the process of developing, and first settled in the New World. They came from many lands and various stations of life. Some brought Europe along with them, but some did not. Many of them came from a life of labor, peasants and people of the lower-middle class who were at that time victims of the old society. They left partly because of religious and economic oppression and partly because of the inequality of social ranks in European society. For the most part, they did not regret what they had left behind.

¹John A. Hague (ed.), American Character and Culture (Deland, Florida: Everett Edwards Press, 1964), p.19.

The picture of the Old World as an abode of sorrow deepened in its colours as the years went by. The exactions of the landlord and the tax-collector, hunger, disease, and the ceaseless struggle for life with little purpose, might well appear more dreadful in the tales of a grandfather than they had been in reality. This rejection of the Old World is one of the first and perhaps the most important of the acquired American characteristics.²

For such people Europe was a source not of security but of inherited bonds, often irrelevant to the needs of the time and place. Beyond the influence of the values and standards of the Old World, they developed their own.... They did not fear a loss of contact with a Europe they never knew.³

The late president John F. Kennedy states clearly and vividly the reasons the immigrants moved to America:

There were probably as many reasons for coming to America as there were people who came. It was a highly individual decision. Yet it can be said that three large forces - religious persecution, political oppression and economic hardship - provided the chief motives for the mass migrations to our shores.⁴

²W.R.Brock, The Character of American History (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1960), p.5.

³Oscar Handlin, The Americans - A New History of the People of the United States (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), p.70.

⁴John F. Kennedy, A Nation of Immigrants (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p.6.

For W.R.Brock, the reasons for mass migration were these three and one more: "... a more likely cause was chronic irritation with the burdens and restraints of a society dominated by hereditary privilege and encumbered with feudal survivals."⁵

Notably, more than half of the immigrants were Englishmen, who came with very advanced ideas about freedom for the individual.⁶ Searching for freedom in politics, economics, and religion, they were already individualists in leaving their homelands and seeking it in the New World. They were seeking, for example, freedom of religious worship and freedom from church authority. In Europe the Church was very powerful and had always acted to defend its authority (e.g., the Church arranged the system of education to suit its own needs rather than those of the whole society). They were also seeking freedom of enterprise, which would provide new opportunities for the poor. As Stephen Vincent Benét said:

⁵Brock, op. cit., p.4.

⁶Ibid., p.3.

In 1924, it was estimated that the Nations of Europe which had contributed most to the population of the United States were (in order of the size of their contributions): Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Germany, Eire, Poland, Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands, France, Czechoslovakia, Russia, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium and Denmark. (Historical Statistics of the United States, U.S. Government Publications: Bureau of the Census, Series B, pp. 279-303.)

There is a country of hope, there is a country of freedom. There is a country where all sorts of different people, drawn from every nation in the world, get along together under the same big sky. They go to any church they choose - Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Mohammedan, Buddhist - and no man may be persecuted there for his religion.... The country is the United States of America.⁷

Russel B. Nye wrote, similarly,

of the traditional belief in individual liberty, of the belief that individual freedom was the most effective and desirable element in the social process, that in it lay the keys to the future of American society.⁸

The immigrants made their way across the Atlantic Ocean and settled in the New World with "... very definite ideas as to the character of the industrial and social life which they were to establish there."⁹ Here was a new world where "... individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men..."¹⁰ and where

⁷Stephen Vincent Benét, America (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1944), p.3.

⁸Russel B. Nye, This Almost Chosen People-Essays in the History of American Ideas (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1966), p.223.

⁹Thomas Jefferson Wertebaker, A History of American Life - The First Americans 1607-1690 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), II, p.1.

¹⁰Oscar Handlin, This Was America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p.39.

[it] is not composed, as in Europe, of great lords who possess everything, and of a herd of people who have nothing. Here are no aristocratic families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion, no invisible power giving to a few a very visible one, no great manufacturers employing thousands, no great refinements of luxury. The rich and the poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe.... We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed. We are the most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free as he ought to be...¹¹



This quotation is from Letters from an American Farmer, (1782) by Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, a Frenchman who in 1765 migrated across the border to the English colonies, and lived until the Revolution in Orange County, New York. He had some difficulties in the course of the struggle for independence and finally left for France in 1780. Letters from an American Farmer, his personal record, gives the potentialities of American life from his point of view from the time he first landed on that continent. This book has become an American classic.

Thus the American frontier was not only a place but a state of mind:

...at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant.... The stubborn American environment is there with its imperious summons to accept its

¹¹Ibid., pp. 37-38.

conditions; the inherited ways of doing things are also there; and yet, in spite of environment, and in spite of custom, each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons, have accompanied the frontier.¹²

O.Fritiof Ander, in his introduction to In the Trek of the Immigrants, says that "Immigration is an expression of individualism..."¹³ For the immigrants to be able to leave their ancestral homes, even when life in them seems intolerable, there must be individual will and great determination and self-confidence, besides the outside forces mentioned above. As Russel B.Nye states in This Almost Chosen People,

The act of decision to move to the frontier was itself a powerful assertion of individualism. The determination to go west... was a personal one; frontier settlement from Plymouth on was a collective migration which arose out of initial individualism. Individualism was not simply one of the values which men found on the frontier; it was one of the motives that set them there.¹⁴

¹²C.Merton Babcock, The American Frontier - A Social and Literary Record (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), pp. 41-42.

¹³O.Fritiof Ander (ed.), In the Trek of the Immigrants (Essays presented to Carl Wittke) (Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana College Library Publication, 1964), p.vii.

¹⁴Nye, op. cit., p.211.

Rhoda Hoff notes that over 43,000,000 men, women and children have made the hard decision to leave their homes in order to begin a fresh life in the new world since 1607.¹⁵ Migrating from various parts of the world, with different ideas about religion, culture and society, the immigrants did not know what they would find in the new world; still, they made a deliberate choice based on fairly good information and the decision to move, according to W.R.Brock, "... was seldom made at a higher level than the family; men might catch the infection from strong-willed individuals but the decision to move remained an individual one, and no one obeyed the commands of a superior."¹⁶

In The Uprooted, Oscar Handlin agreed that the immigrant was individual though

... man at the crossroads knew then that this was a mass movement. Scores of his fellows in the village, hundreds in other villages, were being swept along with him. Yet he moved alone. He went as an individual. Although entire communities were uprooted at the same time, although the whole life of the Old World had been communal, the act of migration was individual.... What happened beyond the crossroads, each would determine by himself. It was immensely

¹⁵Rhoda Hoff, America's Immigrants, Adventures in Eyewitness History (New York: Henry Z. Walck Inc., 1967), p.xi.

¹⁶Brock, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

significant that the first step to the New World, despite all the hazards it involved, was the outcome of a desperate individual choice.¹⁷

The mass migration derived not only from individual disagreement with what the immigrants experienced in the old society, but also from what they expected to obtain in the new one. As Jean de Crèvecoeur wrote in his Letters from an American Farmer, the immigrants were

urged by a variety of motives.... Everything has tended to regenerate them: (new land with natural resources,) new laws, a new mode of living, a new social system. Here they are become men. In Europe they were so many useless plants.... But now... they have taken root and flourished!¹⁸

Ray Allen Billington said about the individual mass migration in his article "How the Frontier Shaped the American Character," that

... the pioneering experience converted settlers into individualists... [Turner's] emphasis on a desire for freedom as a primary force luring man westward and his belief that pioneers developed an attitude of self-sufficiency in their lone battle against nature have been questioned, and with justice.... Yet the fact remains that the abundant

¹⁷Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted, The Epic story of the Great Migrations that made the American people (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951), pp. 37-38.

¹⁸Handlin, This Was America, p. 38.

resources and the greater social mobility of frontier areas did instill into frontiersmen a uniquely American form of individualism.¹⁹

W.H.Werkmeister adds that:

In the struggle for existence, as it was waged in the backwoods settlements, the abilities and personal qualities of individual counted for far more than did his social distinction, or lack of distinction, and his rank and status in a social order far removed from the scene. A new faith in the value and worth of individuals as individuals arose, and with it developed the psychological presuppositions of American democracy.²⁰

When the immigrants first came to America, Nature showed them its riches. The immigrants' world would have been destroyed if America had not provided them with something to fulfill their dreams. There was an abundance of land as well as opportunity which was not true in Europe. Here it was much easier for them to acquire land than in Europe where land had remained in the same hands for generations. In America, it was possible for almost every

¹⁹Sidney Fine and Gerald S. Brown (ed.), The American Past: Conflicting Interpretations of the Great Issues (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), II, p.119.

²⁰W.H. Werkmeister, A History of Philosophical Ideas in America (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1949), p.23.

family to have its own farm. They sought land themselves and it belonged to them and their families; it was valuable property and it was theirs. The Europeans became Americans because they no sooner arrived than they immediately felt the effects of plenty. This was the first time that their lives counted for something. They ceased to be "ciphers"²¹ and felt themselves men because they were treated as such. For them the possession of land was "... a major means to independence and self-sufficiency."²² So it was said that

This unexampled abundance of land and resources was the cardinal factor in the development of American civilization. It molded the character of the American people and was the chief reason for the unique qualities of their way of life.²³

This was also well expressed by David M. Potter in his article "American Women and the American Character:"

When this free land was suddenly conferred upon a people who had previously been held in dependence by the land monopolies of the Old World, it made the American economically independent and this independence made him more individualistic and more egalitarian in his attitudes.²⁴

²¹Handlin, The Americans, p.156.

²²Hague, op. cit., p.18.

²³Henry Bamford Parkes, The American Experience - An Interpretation of the History and Civilization of the American People (2nd ed. rev.; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), p.8.

²⁴Hague, op. cit., p.67.

Leaving their homelands with little information of the new world, these free-minded individuals moved to America and found that it was an open land with apparently inexhaustible resources. America was for them a great opportunity. As Herbert Hoover said in his article "Rugged Individualism," reported in The New York Times, October 23, 1928: "Our country has become the land of opportunity to those born without inheritance, not merely because of the wealth of its resources and industry, but because of this freedom of initiative and enterprise."²⁵

The immigrants with their previous experiences came to this new country with a firm belief in their ability to conquer the wilderness of America. Oscar Handlin named these people "a wilderness people" because

They had no fear of the wilderness, but rather confidence in their ability to master it.

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The forest had been their playground; its sights and sounds were the familiar environment of their growing up.... The very fact that they were a wilderness people, thoroughly at home in the New World, gave them a feeling of power. They could deal with the forest and the savage as their fathers could not; and the frontier was not to them a threat but an opportunity... a mode of escape.²⁶

²⁵Oscar Handlin (ed.), American Principles and Issues: The National Purpose (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1961), p.231.

²⁶Handlin, The Americans, p.70.

As has been remarked before, the act of immigration is productive of individualism. Each would determine by himself what happened in the remote new country. It required the individual to put faith in his ability to build up his future in the new land. The situation forced the immigrants to become a people who depended on themselves. Again Oscar Handlin, in his general comments before the article "How Far Can the Individual Stand Alone?," suggests that:

A society not bound by restraints inherited from the past was frequently tempted to exaggerate the role of the individual in shaping his own destiny. Since everything was susceptible of change for the better, and since improvement was measurable in terms of material well-being, it was easy to conclude that what man became depended not on the conditions about him but on his ability and on the exercise of his own will. All the conditions of American life tended to locate the responsibility for his fate upon the individual's [ability]."²⁷

Certainly failures were many; still there were enough successes in this new country. The settlers were proud of their ability and power, which they believed would contribute to the future greatness of their society. They saw themselves as "a people certain to conquer not by virtue

²⁷Handlin, American Principles and Issues, p.195.

of their suffering but of their strength."²⁸ Independently it was an individual task to fight nature for the chance to exist and this, said Frederick Jackson Turner

... has been continuous to our own day. Facing each generation of pioneers was the unmastered continent. Vast forests blocked the way; mountains ramparts interposed; desolate, grass-clad prairies, barren oceans of rolling plains, arid deserts, and a fierce race of savages, all had to be met and defeated."²⁹

Another facet of individual migration which was deeply rooted in the mind of the American people was that each started his new life on an "equal footing." This was what Alexis de Tocqueville saw in America when he came to search for the essence of American life. According to John F. Kennedy, de Tocqueville "... marveled at the energy of the people who were building the new nation... [and] was impressed most of all by the spirit of equality that pervaded the life and customs of [these] people." According to him this was "... a nation of people with the fresh memory of old traditions who [nevertheless] dared to explore new frontiers, people eager to build [new] lives for themselves in a spacious society that did not restrict their freedom of choice and action."³⁰

²⁸Handlin, The Americans, p.71..

²⁹Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1958), p.269.

³⁰Kennedy, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

It was inevitable that the immigrants would form a society based on the idea of equality. Russel B. Nye said that the colonists were establishing a new society

... from which all the flaws and inequalities of Europe could be erased; none of the old institutions of feudalism - primogeniture, entail, monarchy, the church state, hereditary aristocracy, and so on - were successfully transplanted to the New World.³¹

As we know they left their countries partly because they felt they did not have the freedom which man should have. So, leaving their countries in the belief that man should be equally treated, they found themselves in a climate of free enterprise and equal opportunity. Their ideas were transformed into reality through the exploitation of natural resources. As many years passed, the immigrants' world gradually drifted apart from the Europeans'.

Here was a land in which there were no {hereditary rulers}, no kings and no aristocrats, in which the peasant could become a proprietor, the outcast a respectable citizen and the labouring man could make his fortune.

The poor man was not expected to know his place but to rise from it ...³²

³¹Nye, op. cit., p.3.

³²Brock, op. cit., p.10, 5.

Going back through American history one notes that the American people freed themselves, first from European oppression (by mass migration), later from their burdens as English colonies (by the Declaration of Independence). All this exemplified the **urgo** of the American to be a free individual:

Because he conquered the wilderness with his own hands and carved out a freehold for himself and his family... because he started with his compeers from the same bottom level - for these reasons the attitudes and institutions of his way of life were profoundly conditioned to individualism, democracy, [and] equality.³³

II Its Practical Effects

In the first part of this chapter, it was said that the immigrants were individualists when they sought their new homes. "Intense individuation," Frederick Jackson Turner pointed out in his famous frontier hypothesis, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," (1893) was instilled in the national character, implanting in Americans "traits that made for ... individuality and an

³³Louis M.Hacker and Helene S.Zahler, The Shaping of the American Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), p.XV.

impatient habit of self-assertion."³⁴ "The individual," wrote James P. Dixon, "is still and will continue to be the focus of the American effort, for 'we believe that the individual is central to our own society...'"³⁵

"Perhaps," said Russel B. Nye, "... no ideal is more characteristic of American culture than the emphasis the American places on the importance of the individual and his ability to identify and solve his problems."³⁶

Practically, the emphasis on individualism encouraged the Americans to become a people of self-reliance and self-confidence. William Mathews defined the phrase "self-reliant individualism" in one of his best-selling books, Getting On in the World: Or Hints on Success in Life (1893): "[it is] a vital element of success - a determination to be one's own helper.... It is the secret of all individual growth and vigor, the master-key that unlocks all difficulties in every profession or calling."³⁷

Oscar Handlin suggested that the immigrants had already had confidence when they decided to come to the New World and this characteristic had an influence on later generations:

³⁴Nye, op. cit., p.210.

³⁵Ibid., p.252.

³⁶Ibid., p.208.

³⁷Ibid., p.231.

Their experience, limited when it came to what lay beyond the ocean but not when it came to what was near at hand, generated confidence in their own capacity for achievement.... They believed in the future greatness of their societies because they were proud of their own power. They saw themselves as a people certain to conquer not by virtue of their suffering but of their strength. The faith by which the immigrants had justified the hardships of their departure from Europe became, for their children, the simple confidence in the future."³⁸

Nye added that; "The promise of a new and open society inspired self-confidence in those who decided to go, and expressed itself in the rewards of their individual efforts once they arrived."³⁹

Once they decided to go, it was their self-confidence as well as their adaptability that enabled them to survive in an uncivilized land. With their vision of free land and great opportunities, the immigrants moved to this new world as free individuals. They could expect no help from anyone, as David M. Potter has noted. When the immigrant reached the land, he was faced with

... the necessity for subduing the wilderness by his own personal exertions, in a situation when

³⁸Handlin, The Americans, loc. cit.

³⁹Nye, op. cit., p.211.

he could not call upon doctors, dentists, policemen, lawyers, contractors, well-drillers, repairmen, soil analysts, and other specialists to aid him, [and this] made him more self-reliant.⁴⁰

As a result of their belief in the rights of individuals and the force of conditions in America, the immigrants became people who depended on themselves. To conquer the wilderness in an open land needed courage, strength, ability and self-reliance. Historically, some parts of America were already occupied by the American - Indian.

... at the frontier, [said Frederick Jackson Turner,] the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American.... Thus the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines (and the development of a self-reliant people).⁴¹



For the first time the settlers found themselves

⁴⁰Hague, loc. cit.

⁴¹Habcock, op. cit., p.32.

... away from home, away from the safety of the circumscribed little villages in which they had passed all their years. Now they would learn to have dealings with people essentially different from themselves. Now they would collide with unaccustomed problems, learn to understand alien ways and alien languages, manage to survive in a grossly foreign environment.⁴²

This could be well achieved by rapid adaptation to the changed environment. "The frontiersman depended on himself, not society, for his survival and advancement. Both the relative weakness of institutions on the frontier, and the simplicity of its society, encouraged individualism and self-reliance."⁴³ Self-confidence became basic as they established their society. As Bradford Smith wrote:

The special quality of American culture arises from what the American land and climate did to men who brought with them the glories and the burdens of European culture. Released from the feudal restraints which still clung to ownership even in the seventeenth century, they were driven by long hunger to possess land of their own. The hazards of settling that land - taking it from the Indian by treaty or battle, struggling through trackless forests to find it, hewing out homes and raising crops with nothing but a few simple tools, dying sometimes

⁴²Handlin, The Uprooted, p.38.

⁴³Nye, op. cit., p.210.

in battle or from weather or hunger - these hazards quickly changed into Americans the Europeans who survived. It was struggle that shaped the American spirit.... It encouraged energetic activity and dignified labor with the hands. It made of the independent, self-reliant farmer a symbol which still influences our national life.⁴⁴

As stated above, to the immigrants America was a land of many resources and opportunities. It has remained so throughout American history. At the beginning of the twentieth century, President Theodore Roosevelt said that the aim of the government was to preserve open opportunity for self-reliant action. In other words, each man should have a fair chance to make something of himself.⁴⁵ All expected freedom of enterprise because, as John F. Kennedy wrote:

In the community he had left, the immigrant usually had a fixed place. He would carry on his father's craft or trade; he would farm his father's land, or that small portion of it that was left to him after it was divided with his brothers. Only with the most exceptional talent and enterprise could he break out of the mold in which life had cast him. There was no such mold for

⁴⁴Bradford Smith and Marion Collins Smith, Why We Behave Like Americans (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1957), pp. 90-91.

⁴⁵Nye, op. cit., p.233.

him in the New World. Once having broken with the past, except for sentimental ties and cultural inheritance, he had to rely on his own abilities.⁴⁶

So the philosophy of free enterprise shaped the character of the American individual. The Americans believed that in economic affairs, as elsewhere, a man's success or failure reflected his individual ability to make economic decisions. "The American emphasis on self-reliance, and the corresponding fear of collective dependence on the state, is clearly reflected in laissez-faire economics," said Russel B. Nye:

The philosophy of American free enterprise, emphasizing as it does initiative, self-reliance, and resistance to collective pressures, simply accents those broader values of individualism long accepted by American society.⁴⁷

Theodore Roosevelt affirmed that self-reliance was the primary principle of American individuality.

'Each man,' he said, 'has his own qualities which must determine in the last resort that man's success, or failure.... In the last resort, nothing can supply the place of a man's own individual qualities.' He repeated this idea many times,

⁴⁶Kennedy, op. cit., p.8.

⁴⁷Nye, op. cit., pp. 106-107.

until it became a recognizable theme in his public statements.... Speaking at Provincetown in 1907... he (asserted) that the 'all-important factor for each of us must be his own character,' and again at Memphis the same year, 'The vital factor in each man's effort to achieve success in life must be his own character, his own courage and uprightness...'"⁴⁸

In The Comparative Approach to American History,

Ray Allen Billington stated another reason for mass migration (besides the outer factors which have already been mentioned) in his article "Frontiers":

... one motive transcended all others: the desire for self-betterment. Farther ... they knew, were better lands, richer pastures, more productive farms or mines or ranches. They knew also that they could sell their land or "improvements" at twenty times the price they would have to pay for similar acreage on the outer fringes of settlement. So they drifted onward.... Migration became a habit among frontiersmen precisely because wealth and status lay ahead.

Thus the migratory impulse was quickened... just as the urge and opportunity for self-improvement were heightened... by the business and investment opportunities generated by the exploitation of frontier natural resources.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 232-233.

⁴⁹C. Vann Woodward (ed.), The Comparative Approach to American History (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), p. 84,86.

Louis B. Wright accepted what Billington said and added: "The desire for self-improvement has been one of the most characteristic qualities in Americans from the earliest times to the present day." Moreover, he claimed that this idea derived from the Puritan idea that,

... they were God's chosen people. New Englanders... have always had a strong conviction of their divine calling to 'improve' the world. From the beginning in their country... they have displayed a zeal for religion... and social improvement in accordance with their traditional ideas.⁵⁰

Carrying these ideas with them the immigrants were faced with unfamiliar conditions which, in fact, encouraged them to develop their beliefs. It could be said that there was no organized society at that time. As a result, the individual undoubtedly had to judge everything by previous personal experience, or from his present adaptability. As Russel B. Nye suggested,

The rapid growth of the new nation and its apparently limitless resources for further growth encouraged even greater optimism. The frontier and the relatively open society of the new country allowed each man to believe that he could improve his condition and make his fortune by his own efforts...⁵¹

⁵⁰Louis B. Wright, Culture on the Moving Frontier (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), p. 43, 32.

⁵¹Nye, op. cit., p. 3.

The American came to believe that nothing was beyond his power to accomplish, provided that he could muster the necessary moral and material resources, and that any obstacle could be mastered by means of appropriate methods and technology.⁵²

So brought here by their strong desire for self-advancement and later challenged by the conditions, the frontiersmen came to be self-reliant men. According to Ray Allen Billington, since immigration first began, since the days

... when 'free' land beckoned the downtrodden, the people have believed that any man could shape his own destiny, and have respected those who succeeded. This faith has been sustained by forces rooted in the frontier experience, for the immigrants whose success stories inspired imitation...⁵³

They respected themselves and their" ... deep sense of gratitude to Providence did not preclude pride in what they had themselves accomplished."⁵⁴ Jacques Maritain suggested that this was another characteristic of American life when he said:

⁵²Parkes, op. cit., p.9.

⁵³Ray Allen Billington, America's Frontier Heritage (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1966), p.115.

⁵⁴Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind - An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880's (New Haven:Yale University Press, 1961), p.29.

I would like to mention now other characteristics of American life, namely, the extraordinary resilience and versatility with which the American people face new problems and adjust themselves to new situations. They don't like to accept things as they are, and to let people shift for themselves by dint of suffering and ingenuity. They prefer to change things and situations. They prefer to find a new arrangement, new equipment, a new gadget, a new line of social activity, for the sake of the human individuals involved.⁵⁵

The American, as Jean de Crèvecoeur remarked in his well-known Letters from an American Farmer, was "... a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas and form new opinions."⁵⁶ Oscar Handlin provides this description of the state of mind of the Americans in the early days of their great development:

They were now conscious of their newness as a people; new principles animated them; and they had to assert themselves in new ideas and new achievements. The awareness of their peculiar situation which shaped their character as a people gave a national meaning to the culture and institutions of the Americans. The looseness of their society and their desire for order, the local sources of political power and the concern with individual rights, the disregard

⁵⁵ Jacques Maritain, Reflections on America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p.36.

⁵⁶ Handlin, This Was America, p.39.

for tradition and the eagerness for new knowledge, the tolerance of difference ... were the accomodations of men who lived precariously in an environment that did not limit their future.

And he adds, in summary:

Independence gave political form to American nationality and deepened the characteristic traits associated with it. Pride in the achievement of having humbled the great empire, confidence in the ability to do without the trappings of traditional monarchy, and faith in man's capacity for fresh creation stimulated every imagination. It was only necessary to be daring enough!⁵⁷

⁵⁷Handlin, The Americans, p. 157, 156.