

# THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## CHARACTER – THE GREATEST ASSET OF AMERICA

### LESSON 03 SESSION 02

#### **3.2 Experimental self-government**

Our national character is emphasized in our ability to govern ourselves. Such ability did not develop over night; neither can it be acquired for the asking. No other nation has attained self-government in equal measure with the United States. The Colonies struggled 150 years before they had established a sufficient foundation to take the step that led to the "Great Experiment."

Our present form of government would never have been possible without this long period of preparation, involving study, experience, mistakes, and a growing measure of success, exemplified in the wise legislation inaugurated by several of the colonies, and in the increasing spirit of independence prior to the War of the Revolution. Success was made possible due to the collective fitness of the colonials for the task of self-government.

The colonial was "a good farmer, an excellent schoolmaster, a very respectable preacher, a capital lawyer, a sagacious physician, an able editor, a thriving merchant, a shrewd peddler, and a most industrious tradesman," able to comprehend the full measure of human associations. Hence, with these qualifications, when independence was won, a committee of chosen representatives called to the arduous task of revising the Articles of Confederation, found within themselves a collective knowledge which enabled them to produce that document, the Constitution of the United States, which, Mr. Gladstone said, "is the greatest piece of work ever struck off in a given time by the brain and purpose of man."

#### **3.3 Individual character**

##### 3.3.1 Moral worth

In the discussion of moral worth's, it is primarily true that we weigh and evaluate the Actions of the individual. However, individual acts do not form a haphazard aggregate of unrelated deeds, for back of the act are dominant principles that assure certain continuity in human action. With knowledge of the temperament and trend of mind of a given man, his action under given circumstances may be fairly predicted, since behind the shifting play of emotions found in the mental life of everyone there is a background of permanent emotional associations and processes which change slowly, if at all. This stable background of the moral life is character.

##### 3.3.2 Deeds - an expression of character.

Upon great impulse one may commit an act foreign to his nature. However, in the long run of life, his deeds are an expression of his character. We base our estimate of character upon known performance; we catalogue the individual as good, bad, reliable, unstable, trustworthy, worthless. His worth to society is assessed. We judge what measure of reliance can be placed in him; how far he may be trusted; wherein lies his weakness, and wherein his greatest strength.

### 3.3.3 Public spirit

The secret of the remarkable progress of America in the first 100 years of constitutional government lies in the fact that her public-spirited men were striving to put the best into government, not to take the most out of it.

### 3.3.4 No collective morality

In the very nature of our Government, the responsibility for its social, economic, and political standards rests absolutely upon the character of its individual citizens. There can be no collective morality, integrity, honor that is not the sum of the principles of the individuals of the community, State, or Nation. If the majority is mercenary, the character of the Nation will be ruthless. If the growing tendency to irreligious thought persists, the Nation will become irresponsible.

### 3.3.5 Desire for education and religion

Desire is, perhaps, the greatest force in the determination of individual character. It overrules the handicaps of environment, poverty, and physical defects. It asks no favor of race, creed, or color. It has no determinate end. Its power is to ennoble or debase — *"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."*

The desire of our forefathers for education and religion, intensified with each succeeding generation by the ever-increasing facilities for intellectual development, has fixed the American character upon a high plane of moral worth and honorable attainment.

Knowledge is being extended with a rapidity and scope never before known in human history. By the magic of the facilities of modern communication, its voice is carried to the uttermost coiners of the earth, challenging the present generation to newer and greater fields of adventure and achievement. The right to education is our heritage, established by our forefathers, guaranteed by the law of the land, enriched by our free institutions.

Notwithstanding this privilege illiterates form a large proportion of our electorate. The National Education Association tells us that 4,300,000 illiterate citizens were qualified to vote in the last presidential election. Over 4,000,000 ignorant voters, unable to read any discussion of issues or candidates!

The last census disclosed that 1,783,000 children between the ages of 7 and 13 years were home schooled last year.

Because of universal suffrage, the modern complexity of our national life, and the acknowledged principles of the right of private judgment — open-mindedness receptive of the revelation of truth, a "thoughtful" citizenry is necessary.

*“On the diffusion of education among the people rests the preservation and perpetuity of our free institutions.”* — Daniel Webster.

### **3.4 Foundation of character**

The character of the individual and the Nation is founded upon religion and education — which, united with that force we call "will," give to every individual the means for high attainment.

Submitting yourself to these impelling influences, resourcefulness and unconquerable energy take command. By their power you win self-mastery. The joy of work becomes a reality. Labor is dignified by the pride of accomplishment. Obstacles and handicaps are but a challenge to greater effort. Discipline becomes self-imposed.

*“Religion laid the foundations of our American Government. It neither seeks nor claims any justification for its existence save righteousness. It had its beginning. It found its inspiration, in the religious beliefs of the men who settled our country, made it an independent Nation, and maintained its institutions and laws. If it is to endure it will be through the support of men of like mind and like character.”* — President Coolidge.

#### **3.4.1 Daily performance necessary**

Expressed in terms of unselfish devotion to ideals, our attitude to others, our sense of responsibility, our willingness to give full service, loyal cooperation, our faithfulness to each other, and our reverence for religion, embodied in the daily performance of every task, "character" is the greatest asset of America.