

CITIZENSHIP TRAINING MANUAL

Lesson 2 - Character, The Greatest Asset of America

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2.1 The greatest asset of America

Diversity of opinion as to what is America's greatest asset creates a discussion which leads into every section and every activity of our country. Each individual is governed by the interest that lies closest to his heart.

The doctor declares: "The greatest asset of America is found in our medical schools, hospitals, and our great accomplishments in saving life and insuring the health of our people, for without health there could be no other great achievement."

The teacher asserts: "Our common-school system, our colleges, universities, and our press constitute our greatest asset, for without education industry would stop and our Government disintegrate."

The captain of industry states: "Industry is our greatest asset. What would America be without New England, New York, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, and the thousands of other industrial centers giving employment to millions while they supply the needs of the world?"

Likewise the inventor, the chemist, the scientist, each makes the claim that the fruit of his labor is the greatest asset of America, for what great things in America would have been possible without the creative genius?

The farmer insists that the doctor, the teacher, the industrialist, the scientist, and all the others would not get very far if he failed for a single season to provide the means for clothing and food — to him the greatest asset of America.

They all are right; there are elements of greatness in all the varied endeavors of our country, the coordination of which has brought prosperity and wealth in such measure as to make us envied of all people.

2.2 Cooperation

Forty-eight States, extended between the Atlantic and the Pacific, independent, self-governing Commonwealths, rich in resources, engaged in their own affairs; congested industrial areas of our great cities, pouring out their products to the enrichment of the Nation; millions of farmers providing food and clothing; teachers, preachers, merchants, laborers, lawyers, and clerks, contributing their part; all are working together in the spirit of cooperation.

2.3 Character

What unites a people composed of all the racial stocks of the world? What composes our differences, harmonizes our relationships? What inspires confidence, insures credit, and promotes organization?

What, in the last analysis, guarantees protection of person and property, gives assurance of peace and prosperity, and inspires America to greater adventures and larger achievements?

The answer is not to be found in the sum of all her natural resources, factories, farms, homes, schools, hospitals, and churches. These are created by man and by man can be destroyed.

The security of our property, the continuation of our institutions, the increase of our possessions and the perpetuity of the principles of individual rights, justice, and freedom, the observance of which has made America, lie in character — the greatest asset of America.

2.4 National character

2.4.1 The ideals of the American colonists

The national character of America is grounded in the Puritan stock of the early colonies. From these original settlers, numbering in 1640 a total of 26,000, there has descended to the present time nearly one-fourth of our total population. Up to 50 years ago their descendants and immigrants from the same racial stock composed over 80 per cent of our population.

The outstanding traits of their stalwart characters were defined in the commonplace affairs of their daily lives. They made no play for heroics, were not primarily seekers of fame nor fortune. Lovers of liberty, they boldly fought to maintain their rights: Their dominant trait was the worship of God, a God to be feared, yet a God of justice. A God who punished, yet a God who loved. Bigoted and narrow to the verge of superstition, intolerant of all faiths save their own, they builded a character which to following generations will ever prove their richest heritage.

A stern will born and bred of necessity, hard as the "stern and rock-bound coast" near which they lived, deep and cold as the seas that beat upon their rugged shores, they knew no compromise with duty — it must be done. No easy way was sought nor excuse accepted for duty unperformed.

2.4.2 Community life, church, and town meeting

They established schools, churches, and town meetings, always dominated and often ruled with the iron rod of church authority. In time, bigoted religious intolerance gave way to religious liberty, yet not with the slightest change in the high standards of moral and spiritual rectitude required of every member of the community.

Possessing pride of race, proud of their ancestry, they inspired in the hearts of their children a reverence and respect for family and race which left no room for lax conduct or easy habits.

Severely disciplined within their homes, carefully supervised in their education, the children were taught the obligation of participation in community affairs and were obliged to submit to the severe restrictions imposed by their elders through the laws enacted by the local town meeting.

The restrictions of these laws and the severity of punishment imposed for the slightest infraction are cause for astonishment in these days of easy morals and lax law observance, yet their value as conducive to upright living, strict morals, and honest endeavor is strikingly evidenced by the pronounced influence of the New England community, the church and town meeting, in molding the national character of America.

The New England town was founded for and grouped about the church, which was the clubhouse of the time. But the glory of the New England town was its town meeting, a combination of neighborhood, society, caucus, legislature, and council meeting. This was the most successful political institution of the time, served as a private school in debate, and a nursery of American statesmen. — *National Ideals Historically Traced* — A. B. Hart.

2.4.3 The pioneer spirit

In defining the character of America we find one trait so strong and pronounced as to manifest itself in every period and department of our national development — the "pioneer spirit."

Mixed motives inspired immigration to America. Regardless of why they came, the spirit of the pioneer seemed quickly to possess them with its urgent demand to go forth and conquer the wilderness. In that spirit the New England pioneers, and those from the Middle Colonies and the South, peopled in succession the States beyond the Alleghenies and the Cumberland, advancing by successive steps until they reached the boundaries of the continent.

The pioneer from New England and his cousins, the Scotch-Irish in Virginia and North Carolina, loved a struggle. To them the wilderness held no terror too great or hardship too severe to hold them back. Life was a joyful adventure and the dangers were enticing. Life held the stern duty of making provision for family and posterity. Life was work, and the great forests were there to be cleared. Life was full of promise; there were the vast free lands — theirs for the taking. Life was the gift of God and, never forgetting, they set the stamp of their God-fearing character upon each succeeding community, in school, church, and local government.

People from New England, the Middle Colonies, and the South, flowed together to form neighboring or joint communities, and thus varied the Colonial farmer typo.

This mixed population produced interesting combinations of local government; Michigan, settled largely by New England people, set up the town meeting; in Illinois, first reached by southerners, the county system was established in 1818, and later an option was allowed between town and county. — *National Ideals Historically Traced* — A. B. Hart.

2.4.4 Tenacity of purpose

The very compelling forces of hardship, privation, danger, and isolation bred a spirit of unrestrained freedom which has had a pronounced influence in forming our national character. Compelled to rely upon individual effort in providing and protecting his means of livelihood, the early American quickly acquired the knowledge of individual rights and the determination to maintain them. What was his, won by honest toil or by right of discovery, he was ever ready to defend against all odds.

Their tenacity in what they undertook has never been surpassed by any people, not even the Romans.

I remember that half the Plymouth colonists died the first winter, and that in the spring, when the long waiting *Mayflower* sailed again homeward, not one of the fainting survivors went with her — and I glory in that unflinching fortitude, our stiffest muscle is limp and loose beside the unyielding grapple of their tough wills — *Doctor Storrs*.

This tenacity went far in possessing and saving to America the whole region west of the Mississippi River. The future welfare of the Nation, the preservation of representative government, and the principles for which it stands lie largely today within the hands of the citizens of the West, for into that section has traveled the center of our population, and there is to be found over one-half of the descendants of our Colonial forefathers.

2.5 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."

2.6 Individual character

2.6.1 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, due to the fact that 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.

2.6.2 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.

2.6.3 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.

2.6.4 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 are mercenary, the character of the Nation will be ruthless. If the growing tendency to irreligious thought persists, the Nation will become irresponsible.

2.6.5 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 1,400,000 children between the ages of 7 and 13 years were not in school during the period from September 1, 1919, to January 1, 1920.

Because of universal suffrage, the modern complexity of our national life, and the acknowledged principles of the right of private judgment — an 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.*

2.7 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 religions 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.* ,

3.7.1 *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.

2.8 Physical character

2.8.1 Great resources. — Napoleon asked Talleyrand, "What is America?" To which reply was made, "It is a body without bones." An American adds: "The bones have been developed, and they are bones of steel."

Possessed of a raw continent, millions of square miles in area, composed of boundless prairies, vast forests, mighty rivers, great plains, and rugged mountains, containing fertile soil, rich natural resources in minerals, timber, and water power, the American, lacking tools, supplies, and capital, was forced by the very nature of his task and environment to a life of hard labor, long hours of toil, frugal living, and self-dependence with attending hardships and dangers. Out of these combined conditions was developed a type of hardy pioneer unequalled in the history of mankind.

2.8.2 Developed by pioneers. — In her commercial life America has stepped boldly forth to the great task set before her. Slowly at first, groping her way along great rivers and through deep forests, she began the work of conquering the wilderness, which won as the fruit of her enterprise, first, the full possession of this great domain, and then, for her 300 years of toil, the greatest treasure house among the nations of the earth.

2.8.3 Visions become realities. — Forced to work by the very necessity of finding the means of existence, accepting danger and hardship, privation and suffering as a part of the task, America gave herself to creating material wealth.

Gaining strength and wisdom with succeeding years, America has built achievement upon achievement. No enterprise has been too great for her aggressive spirit. Her dreams and visions have become realities by the force of her will and the magic of her creative ability.

2.8.4 Spirit of improvement and invention. — Ever willing to adopt new ideas, to develop and improve, to tear down and rebuild, to scrap the machine of yesterday for the improved equipment of today, opportunity was never neglected to find a better way to do a larger business.

2.8.5 Success possible to every citizen. — Driven first by necessity, the joy of accomplishment became the spur to greater achievements. The way to comfort, to competency, to wealth was open and free to every citizen, limited alone by individual ability, courage, and determination. Out of great opportunity, with freedom to all, there has been bred a race of men and women of sterling character and outstanding independence.

2.9 Ethical character

2.9.1 Confidence. — American business is based upon the character of its people. J. Pierpont Morgan used to say he banked more on a man's character than on his money. Character is the basis of confidence. Confidence is the basis of credit. Credit, above any other element, is the source of stability in commercial life.

Our building industry, amounting to hundreds of millions annually, is dependent upon borrowed capital from the time of the first drafted plan to completion of each structure. The vast commercial enterprises of the United States are made possible by our system of credit based upon confidence in the integrity of the people.

The ethical character of our commercial relations is based upon respect for and confidence in the nobler things of life and the unflinching observance of business ethics.

2.9.2 High standards of commercial life. — America is a nation of corporations. Every enterprise of any consequence is incorporated. Founders or owners of a given business invite employee and public to share the risk and the profit. The workingman as a shareholder is rapidly becoming a capitalist; in number they have increased to several million and their investments are assuming astonishing proportions. By this means, adjustments of differences between capital and labor are becoming easier as differences arise. The employer in recognizing the employee as a fellow man and not as a commodity opens the door to mutual understanding and square dealing.

As a stockholder, the employee feels the interest and responsibility of a partner. Greater attention is paid to the work, quality is improved, waste eliminated, and profits increased to the mutual advantage of all. The fact that labor is being less exploited and more fairly treated with each succeeding year is not only indicative of economic evolution but also a marked evidence of the high character common to our commercial life.

2.9.3 Spirit of cooperation and compromise. — One of the most encouraging signs of continued prosperity in America is the constantly growing tendency toward compromise and cooperation in the affairs of capital and labor, based upon mutual confidence. Such differences as are bound to arise are, as a rule, disposed of to the general good of all.

2.9.4 No class domination. — No class is permitted to dominate in America. Public opinion, which is always representative of public character, will not permit the assumption of power. Whether it be capital, labor, farmer, group, or section, public character in its dominant sense of fair dealing defeats the effort to acquire unfair advantage.

2.9.5 Spirit of benevolence. — Nothing is more characteristic of modern American life than the pouring out of private wealth for public service. Nowhere are so many philanthropic agencies at work.

There is that in American democracy which creates the spirit of public service through gifts to the public.

In respect to aid and contributions in world disasters America is one of the first in the field of distress and one of the last to leave.

2.9.6 Not materialistic. — The Old World, looking upon the intense activity of this New World, seeing us ever engrossed in material affairs, with little time for leisure, even making hard work of our play in our over anxiety to win at any game, whether it be work or play, has scoffed at our lack of art, literature, and culture and called us a nation of dollar chasers.

Our justification for our so-called gross materiality lies in the fact that we were a new nation — new in a wilderness to be conquered; new in a land without homes, towns, or cities, without schools or churches, without transportation or communication. Under these circumstances there was neither occasion nor opportunity to write music, paint pictures, or sculpture in marble. Our music was in the sweet, sonorous song of the mighty forests and the rushing streams; our pictures were painted daily in the mists of the morning and the waving fields of grain. Our monuments and memorials were carved from virgin forests, built in great cities, in rambling farmhouses set in emerald fields. We were kept too busy providing the necessities of life to find time for the finer accomplishments.

Now, lasting monuments depicting the strength, the majesty, and the beauty of our country are being erected; our large and well-kept parks are ornamented with beautiful sculptures; our colleges, universities, and institutions of music and art are comparable with those of any other part of the world; our public galleries and museums possess priceless works of art.

2.10 Political character

2.10.1 Diplomacy. — America is slowly but surely winning the confidence of the nations of the world. The desire to arbitrate rather than resort to armaments has distinguished America in her international policy, desiring to adjust all differences within the principles of justice and equity. Her commercial treaties are written in terms of square dealing. Backed by the guaranty of the American character, her obligations and her dollars are eagerly accepted wherever they may be offered.

2.11 QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is the result of the coordination of the "varied endeavors" of our country?
2. In what manner has the spirit of cooperation influenced the development of America?
3. Upon what does the perpetuity of our fundamental principles depend?
4. What are the main elements in the Puritan character?
5. What place in our early colonial life was occupied by the "town meeting"? What was its later influence?
6. State the chief characteristics of the pioneer.
7. Upon what is our estimate of character based?
8. What was the secret of our remarkable progress in the first 100 years of the constitutional Government?
9. What depends upon the character of our individual citizens?
10. Name several factors upon which our national character is based.
11. Why is religion an essential characteristic of the American people?
12. Are all American citizens educated? Explain.
13. How does public education affect American political institutions?
14. Why, under our form of government, is a "thoughtful" citizenry necessary?
15. In what manner is the gospel of hard work related to the American character?
16. Upon what is the ethical character of our commercial relations based?
17. To what is the success of our vast commercial enterprises due?
18. Why is the spirit of benevolence characteristic of America?
19. Is America materialistic? Explain.

20. In what is the political character of America expressed?