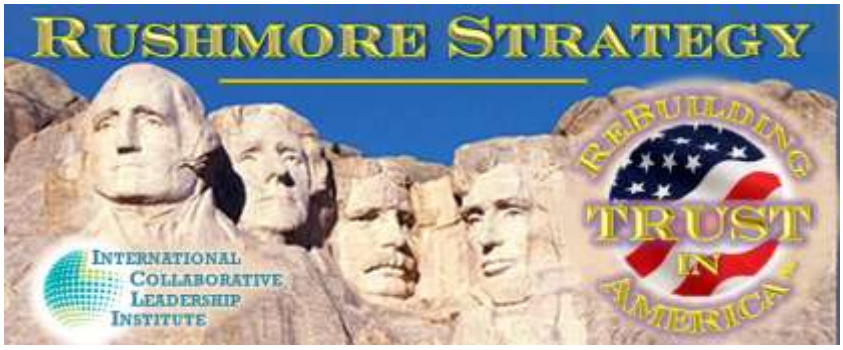


The Five Quests -- Core Beliefs of our Revolutionary Enlightenment

By Robert Porter Lynch

How could a cluster of little colonies engender such strong support that they could overcome the strongest army in the world? The answer lies in understanding a key hidden factor: the Founding Fathers[1] (those who signed the Declaration in 1776 and later created the Constitution) had a powerful set of core beliefs that then drove them to create a new nation based on a system of governance for a democratic republic.

They had a vision, a mission, now they needed an operating plan – that was first the Constitution, and then a government that could be controlled by the Constitution.



Fundamentally, the "gap" between their anger on the one hand and their vison on the other was so conspicuous that something had to give. Anger had to be transformed into a higher reality. That's what the Age of the Enlightenment gave the Founding Fathers – thus they were "enlightened realists who embodied these values as the basic framework for the Revolution's motivations.

Guiding Principles of the Revolution

The Enlightenment was characterized by Five Core Beliefs -- The ***Penta-Quest***:

#1—Reason & Logic:

By using logical thinking and reasoning, the philosophers analyzed truth in the world. Logic and reason can lead you to the right and moral answers. Reason is the primary source of authority and legitimacy. This embraces the idea of finding meaning and purpose as a fundament striving for all humans Science will uncover new truths that should alter our core understandings about reality and nature.

Wisdom, the greatest source of truth that united the heart and the mind, could only be found if one travelled the pathway of reason. Wisdom enabled discernment of the motives of others and enabled leaders to create environments where they brought out the best in people. It would temper the strongest passions toward anger, hate, and revenge, moderating the tendency of people to see things fairly, to respect others, and to focus on higher truths than one's own personal, narrow point of view. Wisdom was essential in the building of good character.

[1] Generally, the Founding Fathers are considered the signers of the Declaration of Independence, the framers of the Constitution & Bill of Rights, plus Thomas Paine, the most articulate and passionate of the advocates.

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#2 – Ethical Natural Order:

All the forces and phenomenon in human nature could be divided into those that came from humankind's animal or bestial nature, contrasted against those that elevated people to a higher "divine" plain. Thus, human behavior must be in alignment with the larger order of the universe.

Nature was neither random nor irrational. A strong moral/ethical character was borne into humans as part of divine Moral Order. This is the source of the statement "All people are created equal."

Understanding this divine ethical order requires engaging in acts of personal conscience, not to be imposed by any single organized religion. Integrating Moral Order, Reason, and Logic will help in the next principle. Ethics, from the Greek *ethos*, meant having a strong moral character upon which to base courageous decisions to uphold the greater good of a community.

Ethical Order acknowledged the higher emotions of love, caring, compassion and imagination, while creating a bulwark against the lower order emotions of our animal instincts of aggrandized self-interest which could ruin our abilities to function as communities in our mutual interest. As Lincoln eloquently stated: "A House divided against itself cannot stand." The ideals of unity derive from Ethical Natural Order. All just law, especially our Constitution, must be based on Reason and Ethics.

#3 – Power of Progression:

The idea of destiny was central to the Founding Father's vision of a new order. They were stalwart in affirming the belief that each human being in each generation, uniting as a civilization, should be on a steady trajectory of continuous improvement.

This commitment, embracing deep wisdom, emanated from our Greco-Judeo-Christian heritage that held the steadfast belief it was the duty of each citizen to continually striving to make their community better. While they recognized the value and the difficulty in such a quest, never the less their resolve was bold and strong.

To accomplish this, a strong emphasis on education was necessary. Both society and individuals must dedicate themselves toward a never-ending process toward perfecting our flawed humanity and civilization.

Old feudal structures must be disassembled. Authoritarians failed at the power of progression. Citizens should have the opportunity to own property and never be beholden to feudal landowners in the European form of serfdom, nor should any man be enslaved by another.

#4 -- Democratic Governance:

Authoritarian rule was utterly rejected and despised as illegitimate and ineffective. An enlightened and educated society of responsible, moral citizens must be capable of establishing a republic that existed for the people, by the people, and of the people. Building self-governing democratic communities, required balancing individual rights with social obligation. Forces of oppression should be able to be effectively neutralized and unalienable rights and liberties preserved. No religion should dominate, but each should be able to flourish and be protected. The endless cycles of war that sucked the life out of European economies was the result of illegitimate predatory despots and kings, who could not thrive in an educated society.

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Lest we forget, the roots of American democracy and freedom are deeply embedded in the foundations of our culture. The Founders understood that that the democratic ideal should always be aiming for bettering the condition of the people.

This ideal of well-being of the people is reflected in three of the original colonies incorporating the name "Commonwealth" in the name and charter (Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia). Massachusetts chose the name for the expressed purpose of expressing the ideal that "the people ... form themselves into a free, sovereign, and independent body politic, or state." This thinking comes from earlier Enlightenment English thinkers that believed in the goal of creating a political entity for the common good, which expressed the ideals of a new democratic state.

From the outset, democratic self-rule was top-of-mind and centre-of-heart. Four hundred years ago, in 1620, *before* the passengers on the *Mayflower* landed in Plymouth, they signed the *Mayflower Compact.* It was a truly historic event, because it marked the first time a diverse group (40% religious Pilgrim separatists, 60% freedom seekers) outlined a democratic form of government, with fair laws, and elected governance. In the Compact (which was brief – only about 200 words – a conciseness of thinking that seems to elude lawyers today), the signers pledged to abide by those laws and regulations that served "for the general good of the colony." In New England it sprang from adapting congregational patterns of their church behavior to their civil governance, embracing fundamental principles of self-government and common consent.

It was this group of Boston centered Puritans that propagated across New England, and inculcated their thinking about congregations into their political structures. The hundreds of small towns that sprung up were democracies. They believed that self-rule was a divine gift, and their loyalty to the King was subordinate to God, whose laws were paramount.

To this day, most small New England towns still have their annual Town Meeting, [2]where residents now approve the annual budget. In colonial times they conducted all major affairs through the Town Meeting structure. Patriots who launched the Revolution used their Town Meetings to unify the Sons of Liberty. The very bonding of Patriots in the Revolution evidenced how Americans teamed together to blunt and beguile the British, it was to preserve and protect the hard-won heritage of their colonial ancestors.

#5 – Happiness & Well-Being – the ideal of the Commonwealth:

Unlike the medieval belief that life was meant for suffering and happiness to be acquired in the afterlife, happiness was part of the Creator's Natural Law. By engaging in the other four principles, a profound sense of well-being could be attained. People could trust their neighbors, trust their leaders, and trust that the universe in their world was a "friendly" place. This was not Hedonistic indulgence, nor unrestrained pursuit of self-interest – happiness was a balance of self-interest and mutual-interest, attained in creating a friendly community of well-being with people synergistically serving each other – the whole was greater than the sum of the parts. This was not to be a fully harmonious world of placid contentment, but a vibrant world with civil debate and

[2] This should not be confused with "Town Hall Meetings" today, which are essentially gatherings where politicians can hear the opinions of local folks.

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dedication to the principles of justice and equity. The main purpose of government was to help ensure the well-being of its people.

Looking back at the founding of America, when one reads of writing of Jefferson and many of his contemporaries, one is struck with the sense of optimism, vision, and expanding possibilities that the new America will provide. It was the Age of the Enlightenment – a time when people believed in and sought solutions aimed at the ultimate perfectibility of human nature and humanity's conditions of the world. The harmonized integration of governance, nature, economics, technology, and community was the aim of many of the leaders of the time. Jefferson's vision of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness"[3] was an aspirational goal universally accepted as worthy of collective energy.

Compare these core beliefs with today's beliefs about America's future.
What are our core beliefs today?
Perhaps our cynical world has no positive core beliefs.
Thus, we have no vision, no centre, no core, no inspiration.

The synergistic impact of these five principles
working in unison cannot be overstated.
They define our core identity as Americans –
what it truly means to be a "Patriot."

To best understand this *alignment of energies* – otherwise known as *synergies* – it's valuable to hear the words of those on the scene in their own words:

> "It may in truth be said, that in no part of the world are the people happier … or more independent than the farmers of New England." – Encyclopedia Britannica 1797 [4]

These five guiding principles were spread among the network of colleges, newspapers, and pulpits, coupled with the vast network of influence created by the linkages in the Committees of Correspondence. Consequently, the Penta-Quest of the Age of Enlightenment became imbedded in colonial thinking. Belief systems in both people and communities were elevated and enlivened, simultaneously being grounded in reality. Colonist became aligned and unified.

The Penta-Quest fully encapsulates revolutionary ideals exemplified by the Rushmore Presidents. Keeping the Penta-Quest alive is central for Saving Our Democracy.

[3] In Jefferson's philosophy, happiness could only be attained by leading a moral, ethical life.
[4] See Marx, Leo; *The Machine in the Garden – Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*; Oxford University Press, 1964, page 73 (this book is a noteworthy documentation of the exuberance of the era).

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