

The Soul of America

Lt. Gen. Daniel B. Strickler

This great country of ours has a marvelous history made by people who came to America from all parts of the world with fixed purposes. From the start, they determined to be a free people, willing to work to gain all that they justly could by the sweat of their brows and the use of their talents. They were interested in making their own personal stakes while their neighbors could make theirs too.

They wanted no outside governmental interference. For their government, they wanted a simple set-up of their own, to be operated by people of their own choosing through the use of the ballot. They intermarried, pioneered, assembled when necessary, and provided all the important freedoms under a Bill of Rights. By adhering to the principles of freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of religion, the extensive use of communication and transportation, they developed a personality as an American people. That personality has character which means so much to the development of our nation and to our relations with peoples of the world. I can best explain this by an experience I had forty years ago.

In 1927 the people of the Republic of France invited the American veterans of World War I to go to France to celebrate the tenth anniversary of America's entering World War I. Thousands of veterans, through the American Legion, prepared to make the pilgrimage. In my home town of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a number of us thought it would be a fine gesture for us to take some earth from graves of our soldier dead, buried in the soldiers' plot, put it into a small wooden box, carry it to France; and, while there, place the earth on some graves of our soldier dead, buried in France.

We took the box of earth across the seas. One day, in the midst of a program of activities provided for us by the War Veterans of France, a small group of us went out from Paris to the large American cemetery at Romagne. There, during a quiet touching ceremony, where thousands of white crosses stand row by row, I lifted the American soil from the box and placed it on the graves of several of our soldier dead, including the grave of 1st. Lt. Daniel S. Keller, son of the late Judge William H. Keller of Lancaster. Then I took some of the soil from those graves, and placed it in the same little box, to be carried back to America and put on the graves of our soldier dead, from which we took the earth to be taken to France.

The ceremony was ended by a small band playing the Star-Spangled Banner, followed by the Marseillaise. But then a French officer, Captain Henry Oller, spoke up in an emotional voice, "Ah! You Americans came here in 1917 and spilt your blood on the fields of France. Now you come here again to bring a bit of America to France, but the thing that counts is the Soul of America."

What a splendid tribute that was. Those words I shall never forget, for I realized then that America had a spirit as an activating influence in its national life.

It was the Soul of America that inspired our revolutionary soldiers to fight and win. It was the Soul of America that cried itself into the Declaration of Independence when America was born in 1776. It was the Soul of America that expressed itself in the very framework of our government when the Constitution was written, giving notice to the whole world that we wanted "a more perfect union for establishing justice, insuring domestic tranquility, providing for common defense, promoting the general welfare, and securing to ourselves and our posterity the blessings of liberty."

It was the Soul of America that again cried out "The Union forever", in the days of the rebellion of 1860's. It was then realized that only in union is there strength, and that a divided nation could not long endure.

It was the Soul of America that stirred the American people in 1917 and 1918 when this nation went to war across the seas, "to make the World a safe place where democracy could exist." We soon showed our anxiousness to have our own Republic continue to exist in this world without the threat of being destroyed by other nations. Our purpose prevailed when an armistice came in 1918. Thinking that World War I was a war to end all wars, we returned to continuing our way of life in America—unmolested by outside interference.

Then came World War II and we were very much concerned again with a world bent on destroying democracy. In 1941 we saw Europe in the throes of war. The human race was being exterminated; civilization was dying. Into that holocaust the United States of America entered after the attack at Pearl Harbor, when the nation decided that we could no longer stay out of the war with honor, with self respect, or with safety to our homes and loved ones.

The Soul of America was ready to be counted. The American people grasped the situation quickly, and swung into action rapidly. We did what we did with tremendous earnestness and enthusiasm. We realized that our very lives were at stake as well as those of millions of innocent people throughout the world. So a wave of fighting spirit swept over the land. The people geared themselves to work, produce and provide that which was necessary for the conduct of winning the war. The call went out: "To Arms!" Millions responded. Many fought, bled and died in the air, on the seas, and on the battlefields of the world. A great price was paid for the victory that came first in Europe against the aggressor nations, and finally, in the Pacific, against the treacherous foe of the East.

Yes, we saved America intact. How thankful we were for keeping the ravages and destructions of war from our land. We still had our communities, strong and resourceful, while thousands of communities throughout the world suffered otherwise.

As though a miracle was taking place, the Soul of America burst forth in all its effulgence. We did not ask for any reparations. We did not acquire any territory from our enemies or from any nation. We did not take any booty. We immediately entered on a course of stabilizing the world so nations might find themselves and regain their dignity. As deeply in debt as we were and are now, we have given, and are still giving great assistance and much of our means to the less fortunate nations and peoples in other parts of the world. This—to help them to rehabilitate, and rebuild, not only their homes and institutions, but strong governments of their own. We hoped, and still hope, that these struggling peoples in other parts of the earth will let their souls speak out in the conduct of their national affairs.

We cannot insist that other nations use the same form of government we have. But we can insist that whatever kind of government and way of life they choose or permit, must be such for the guidance of their own destiny, and one that will not interfere with the type other nations want to use.

This has been our national purpose which we have been pursuing. But in the pursuit, we found that some nations had not caught the full significance of our purpose; and the world was disrupted again by the cold war in Europe, the disturbances in the middle east and Africa, and the conflicts in Asia.

In the midst of all this, the Soul of America expressed itself again, and is still crying out that the tactics of aggressor nations against the existence and independence of other nations shall not prevail without defense on our part. We contained Communism in Europe, stopped the spread of Communism in Korea in the 1950's, and are now in the midst of stopping its spread in Viet Nam and Southeast Asia.

We Americans have lofty ideals, we are enthusiastic, and are generally patriotic. And patriotism to me means simply a concern about one's country, and doing something about it. Our thinking and actions fall into three areas. First, the area of the Law which compels obedience. Second, the area of freedom which permits one to do as he chooses, just so long as his doing does not prevent others from doing likewise. Third, there is the great middle area of the unenforceable, appealing to the conscience. We stress much the field of law, we speak much about our freedoms; but in our great nation today the real, true determining factor is the force of public conscience—that is, public opinion.

America is a union of people of all kinds: native and exotic, rich and poor, the good and the bad, the old and the young, the lazy and the industrious, those of every faith, the religious and the non-religious, those who love, those who hate, the wise and the foolish, the cautious and the hasty, the honest and the dishonest, those who

pray and those who curse. These are We, the People of the United States. These are the governed. These are the rulers. These are the people who have the sovereign power and the kingly privilege to vote that power to govern themselves through their chosen representatives.

Our country has faced many difficulties and we have had stormy seas, but we have progressed because we have solved our problems in the American way. It is well to remember that the establishment of the American form of government was a stupendous achievement by men, who through thinking, through study, through reflection, through insight, through practical experience, had fully grasped the significance of the task to which they had devoted themselves, and accomplished that task in such a manner as to arouse the admiration of the entire civilized world. These men built a representative republic. They were thinking of liberty, the consent of the governed, the preservation of the rights to the states, protection against spoliation and tyranny, and the ways and means by which public opinion might, in an orderly fashion, express itself in statute laws, judicial decisions and executive acts.

So today, whatever we Americans do, we must not yield to any tendency to haul down the flag and express defeatism. We must not yield to any tendency to lunge into matters, regardless, and do that which seems expedient to do at the moment. What we must do is to recognize the necessity of making a calculating analysis of the situations as they exist and as they arise, allay fears, have alternate plans, and produce a long range program that will work.

The Soul of America is immortal, and it is the thing that counts to let freedom ring. In the long run it is the spirit that will guide America in its course of action to bring about an honorable peace in Viet Nam.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Bursk Strickler is one of the most distinguished men to have lived in Lancaster County; he has served his community, state and nation with uncommon distinction in war and peace, for civic betterment, and good government.

After graduating from Columbia High School and Cornell Law School, the young attorney enlisted in the Pennsylvania National Guard, thereby beginning a career which would see him become the youngest captain in World War I and rise to the highest military rank—Lieutenant General—following World War II and the Korean Conflict. During this long military career, General Strickler saw active service from the Mexican Border Dispute of 1916 to the United Nations Command in the Korean Conflict of 1949-1953. He was the only combat officer to serve in the 28th Division in both World Wars; in the Second War, he commanded regiments in five campaigns, including the Battle of the Bulge. Nearly a score of major decorations, including two from the Belgian king and the French Croix de Guerre with Palm, were presented to him.

Like Cincinnatus, General Strickler plunged into civic affairs and his law practice during peace time. A member of the Lancaster County Bar, and admitted to practice before the Pennsylvania Supreme and Superior courts, and the United States District and Supreme courts, General Strickler earned the respect of his colleagues quickly, and when corruption, crime, rackets, and vice plagued Lancaster city during the late 1920s and early 1930s, he was asked to become Police Commissioner temporarily to rid the city of the undesirable elements. In a short time Lancaster was clean "as a



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hound's tooth," a condition that has persisted. General Strickler served his community as a member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for a term, as Lieutenant Governor during the Duff Administration, and as a delegate to the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention in 1967-1968. He has served as president of the Lancaster County Bar Association.

He is active in and has served in the highest offices of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Order of the Purple Heart, National Guard Association; Lancaster County Chapter, American Red Cross; Lancaster County Chapter, Pennsylvania Society of Sons of the Revolution; Lancaster County Council, Boy Scouts of America; Lancaster YMCA; Lancaster Blind Association; and Kappa Sigma Fraternity, Cornell. He is active in the various Masonic and Knights Templar organizations. A member of First Presbyterian Church, General Strickler has served as a ruling elder.

He has been active in Republican politics most of his adult life, and has served as a Committeeman from 1928 to 1942. In 1948 he was a delegate-at-large to the Republican National Convention.

General Strickler is married to Caroline Grace Bolton; and they have two children.