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Bird's Eye

Karl Zinsmeister

They're One of a Kind, and All Around You

"The end of national freedom is individual freedom."
That was Irish patriot Patrick Pearse's reminder that
the whole purpose of creating and defending a nation is
to allow everyday people to live as they choose.

I would go even further: Not only should individual freedom be the *end* of national freedom; it is also the true *source* of national freedom and prosperity. Amidst modern pressures for centralized decisionmaking, it's easy to start thinking that what's important to a society is to have a powerful government, big companies, a glossy culture, lots of interventionist social institutions, and as many "world class" collectively funded entities as possible—from stadiums to shopping malls to state parks to school rooms to super-sonic fighters. But truth be told, all these impressive creations are just side effects, the products of a system that puts individual freedom first. Making construction of strong institutions and slick stuff a higher priority than letting individuals carve lives of their own choosing will only produce a nation where few things work really well.

Alexis de Tocqueville compared the monarchical France of his day (where gilded lords organized all the great projects) to democratically fragmented frontier America. He was "struck by the innumerable multitude of little undertakings," and recorded his "daily astonishment at the immense works carried through...by a nation which, one may say, has no rich men."

Reading through Benjamin Franklin's autobiography recently, I noticed the American ordinariness of Franklin's successes. Ben was just another smart kid, not categorically different from millions of other energetic 17-year-olds feeling stifled by their home town societies. In most eras and most countries, that stultification would just be tough luck. But Franklin lived in an unusual civilization which allowed individuals to dramatically change the direction of their lives. And once he found his natural niche, he began to gush out productive innovations.

Individual invention is the story of America. We have unprecedented opportunities to choose our own course, and in the process we often break down old problems in dramatic ways. Of course, different people will take advantage of this rare freedom to different degrees, in different ways, and at different stages of their lives. Lots of folks, displaying an eerie lackawanna, will never quite get out of their easy chairs. A few will be like Bob Coté (profiled on page 20), who literally pissed the first decade or so of his adulthood into a gutter before rising to become a swirling dynamo of life-transforming activism. Then there are Andres Duany-types who erupt with red hot energy and fresh ideas nearly every waking hour (page 14). Others such as Linda Chavez (a small portion of whose new autobiography we extract on page 34) seem driven by ghosts to escape the limitations imposed on them by birth or fortune.

Americans like the Western sodbreakers Blake Hurst interviews on page 28 just chug away quietly over a lifetime, exhibiting great stamina in the face of obstacles thrown in their path by tyrants abroad, autocrats at home, and harsh nature. It took the Reverend

Hudson Stuck—a bookish Englishman who reinvented himself as a saver of Indian souls—until he was nearly 50 to become a mountain-climbing hero (page 36).

The aim of this installment of *The American Enterprise* is to sketch and analyze a selection of strong, quirky, and independent “American Originals” like these. We believe you’ll enjoy their stories, but our deeper purpose is to help you think through the influences that produce thick crops of similarly impressive men and women in communities all across our nation. Such citizens are no small matter, for a country is ultimately defined not by its laws or its economy or its geography, but by the quality of its people.

Baby bees, an acquaintance of a beekeeper tells me, must force their way, with great effort, out of the wax capsules in which they mature. It is a difficult struggle, but the effort of pressing through the sealed cap cleans the bees’ wings of sticky substances that could otherwise inhibit their flying. Occasionally, moths will get into hives and eat the tops off of the nursery cells. This allows the baby bees to emerge effortlessly, but because the coatings on their wings are not rubbed off in the process, many of these fledglings are unable to fly.

For humans as much as bees, struggle is often necessary for the creation of a strong and durable character. Certainly Bob Cote’s success in reforming derelicts stems in large measure from the hard lessons he learned and the tenacity he developed in first rescuing himself from dissipation. Take away his misery and you’d take away his potency. That’s a sobering observation for us air-conditioned, shock-absorbed, increasingly coddled Americans.

Another admonition that emerges from Cote’s story is the importance of individual accountability, and of the personal touch. Oscar Wilde once wrote that “the chief advantage that would result from the establishment of socialism” is that it “would relieve us from the sordid necessity of living for others, which presses so heavily upon almost everybody.” Wilde wanted the state to take care of the less fortunate so he’d be off the hook. Against this way of thinking Cote is a walking, talking thunderclap. Material help disconnected from human concern and close monitoring not only won’t help the less fortunate, he says, it will actually make their lives *worse*. So don’t expect cool, distant bureaus to replace active individuals as solvers of tough social problems. It won’t work. We’re always going to need ardent American Originals.

Vigorous, free-living people are, by definition, often jarring. Bobby Knight, scrutinized on page 24, is a prime example. Certainly no one will ever mistake Mr. Knight for Mr. Rogers. Most of the Bobby-Knight-is-a-psycho image, however, has been manufactured by pithless journalists who are either intimidated or offended by his hard-nosed masculine personality. Knight-haters seem to be more motivated by a censori-

ous political correctness and a disdain for fierce men than by any fair assessment of his career. And if an American in Knight’s line of work isn’t allowed to be ferocious, who is? Do we really want all our male leaders to be fuzzy-eyed teddybears?

The unfortunate reality is that many of the American Originals we profile in this issue have run awry of the sensitivity police in one way or another. Like Knight, Bob Cote and Linda Chavez have been hounded by the perpetually offended. The plucky Klamath Basin farmers whose tale we tell in our third feature have come under attack from the liberal establishment in ways that directly imperil their way of life.

Each of these worthies has fired back, often along the lines of the historic declaration of rebellion made by Clarence Thomas (another American Original who often finds himself in left-wing crosshairs). In 1998, Thomas declared to a cluck-clucking National Bar Association convention, “I come here today...to assert my right to think for myself, to refuse to have my ideas assigned to me.... I come to state that I’m a man, free to think for myself and do as I please.” That is the unstified cry of American Originals everywhere.

Fortunately, ample courage, originality, and native wit exist to keep us supplied with leadership from American Originals for the foreseeable future. I run into fresh, pungent, impressively independent characters in many parts of the country. Just a few weeks ago, while backpacking in Wyoming, I met a handsome woman in her early 20s working alone as a ranger in a wilderness cabin with no electricity or phone, surrounded by challenging topography and predatory animals. She works armed with a can of pepper spray to slow down grizzlies, a map/compass/and GPS receiver, a hip-mounted water bladder, and a knife and automatic pistol with several extra clips on her belt. Tough gal. One of five children of a railroad mechanic, raised in splendid isolation on a ranch, with a brother who makes his living riding broncos bareback in rodeos. She’s an anonymous Westerner, not a celebrity or a politically important person, but just the kind of sturdy, self-reliant citizen who keeps this nation hard and unbought.

American Originals needn’t be rural autarks. My partner on this fathers-and-sons backpacking week was a pal who had never slept a night on the ground before our trip. A real city and computers and civilization guy. But also a very tough cookie, and someone who has created an impressive life for himself from scratch. His father came to this country from Greece, and reached the end of his days as he had begun them—essentially illiterate. Son George studied his way into Cornell University and then law school; now he’s a district attorney in New York state. Another American Original.

They’re around you—if you look. Praise be.



Sidelights

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America now requires its local affiliates to enlist homosexuals as volunteers and mentors. Parents with children enrolled in school-based BBBSA programs will not be informed if their child is matched with a homosexual. ☛ A math test given to students at Juniper Middle School in Manitoba featured the question, "Rufus is a pimp for three girls. If the price is \$65 per trick, how many tricks per day must each girl turn to support Rufus' \$800 per day crack habit?"

☛ Iran raised the age at which a girl can get married without her parents' consent to 13. The previous age of consent was nine. ☛ The Iraqi News Agency quotes Nation of Islam leader **Louis Farrakhan** as saying, "The Muslim American people are praying to the almighty God to grant victory to Iraq" in the event of war with the U.S.

Libertine *Village Voice* sex columnist (and **Al Gore** supporter) **Dan Savage** wrote that the "recently unveiled **Bush Doctrine** is a necessary evil. Ask yourself this question and answer it honestly: If it was within your power in August of last year to order a preemptive strike that would've prevented the attacks of September 11, would you have done it? Of course you would. That's the Bush Doctrine." ☛ **Mona Baker**, of Britain's University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, dismissed two Israeli scholars from the academic journals she edits, because of their nationality. "I deplore the Israeli state," she told the *Telegraph*. "Israel has gone beyond just war crimes. It is horrific what is going on there." ... Los Angeles economist **Glenn Yago** has

formed Pups for Peace, an organization that will buy and train bomb-sniffing dogs for Israel to use in preventing terrorism. ☛ Italy will assist America in developing a missile defense system, making it the first European country to cooperate on the project.

There are 9,000 witches in Australia, according to the 2001 census, an increase of 350 percent in five years. Witchcraft is now the fastest-growing "religion" in the country. ☛ Thirty-one Ugandan prisoners escaped custody when their guards left to chase a rabbit. ... An escaped prisoner in Panama was eaten by a crocodile while trying to swim to freedom. ☛ Speaking at a recent conference, **Jesse Jackson** referred to police officers as "the militia" and said there "is a pattern of African Americans being beaten by the militia and killed by the militia.... These are all acts of terror, and we really need to get a definition of terrorism. Unarmed citizens being

beaten and killed by the militia is an act of terrorism." ☛ Under pressure from health food activists, California education officials banned mention of "foods of low nutritive value" in its schoolbooks. The short story "A Perfect Day for Ice Cream" is now simply titled "A Perfect Day." ... Washington state banned references to "Orientals" in statutes, codes, rules, and regulations. They will now be called "Asians."

"Let me tell you what is impressive. You're not wearing a flag...I say hip-hip-hooray for that," observed **Phil Donahue** to **Tom Brokaw** during an interview. "I think if you wear a flag, it's a suggestion somehow that you're endorsing what the administration is doing at the time. And I don't think journalists ought to be wearing flags." ☛ The Polish Law and Justice party is urging that a reference to God be placed in future EU constitutional treaties. The party believes "Europe needs a reliable spirit and moral fundament. Europe's political unity cannot be built without cultural unity which at core is a relationship with God." ... Poles bested all other Europeans in a test of history and current events sponsored by *Reader's Digest*. Britain and Portugal finished last.

The European Union and its single currency, the euro, won't last longer than ten years, predicts economist and Nobel Laureate **Milton Friedman**. ☛ A British theater company has dropped the word "hunchback" from its stage version of the classic novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* to avoid offending the disabled. The new title is *The Bellringer of Notre Dame*. —BB

