

STILL
COMMON
SENSE

RODGER CARLYLE

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*“Do I not destroy my enemies when
I make them my friend?”*

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

This book is dedicated to sharing with you the economic, historical, legal, and societal beliefs that make up what I call truth. Your interpretation of the same components is every bit as valid to your truths. While I hope to expose you to some different beliefs, some different historical facts, what I hope for the most is that you can see that what I want in America is similar to what you want.

*“Fight for the things that you care about. But do
it in a way that will lead others to join you.”*

—RUTH BADER GINSBURG

PREFACE

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK...THE COLLISION OF THINKING AND FEELING

BROTHERS AND SISTERS not talking. Parents and their kids stressing over beliefs. Politicians afraid to work out their differences. Massive tax increases that seem to do nothing. Spending and debt that exceed what was needed to win World War II. Your media is all propaganda, yours is all lies. Trump is saving the country. No Trump is destroying the nation. Racist, you are destroying the planet. Socialist, go back to work. I'm right, you're wrong. You rich business owners just don't understand what it's like to be a worker.

Two men were talking about what could be done to bridge the liberal-conservative divide. The conversation wasn't about promoting one side or the other, rather they were concerned that the fraying edges of society were slowly tearing at the center. Each had experienced difficult conversations in the past few days. Employees, friends, even relatives were angry, but when asked why, didn't have any clear explanation. It's just not fair isn't much of a starting point for a discussion. The fair response had been part of conversations between the business community and employees for years. Diversity, equity, and inclusion on one hand. Opportunity, obligation,

and commitment on the other. Profits keep the doors open and provide the capital to grow. Profits are just taking money out of the pockets of the workers. It seemed these conversations were between people living in parallel worlds.

The men bumped into each other over the years serving each other's business growth by providing goods and services. Both had been stung by businesspeople who failed to live up to their commitments, and employees who believed having a job didn't mean doing the job. Beyond any other connection, both had started with next to nothing and built successful companies. Both were white, and to many that meant that the door to success was already open for them.

One, Dave, is a construction executive with business interests in multiple states. The other an author who spent years in the business world before a battle with a rare cancer made it clear that it was time to pursue the career he'd always wanted. One is a Republican deeply engaged in his church. The other, the author, is an independent who is never closer to God than when sitting by a clear running river. Both are focused on family and the community. Both moved away from their home states to seek greater opportunity. Both are pilots and find that outdoor activities are the perfect release needed from intense careers.

Over the months, these men continued the conversation with other men and women, liberal and conservative. Only one common theme emerged, everyone was unhappy.

We start with this brief profile to be clear and honest about the origins of this book. All of us share a deep concern about where the country is heading and about how divided we have become. To the two friends, the divide seems to be more about process than final results. Perhaps that is because our educational backgrounds emphasize process. One of us is a science major with an emphasis on chemistry and biology and the other a political science major with emphasis in political economics and language.

In both fields of study there are absolutes based on facts, but way more unknowns than knowns. **Keep that thought in mind, more unknowns than knowns.**

Shining a light onto the unknowns is critical to both fields. Certain biological behaviors, for example among animals, are repetitive enough and consistent enough to be labeled truths. Yet one of the critical pieces of scientific research is to study exceptions. Political Science focuses on human interaction and much of that is also predictable. Political doctrine focuses on how man interacts with others in a defined world. Yet at times the defined world turns upside down.

For example, in much of today's discourse, success is labeled destructive; successful people accumulating wealth are evil. Those struggling to better themselves, lacking skills and specific talents are too often labeled lazy. Where the free speech movement of the 1970's treasured differences and debate, with universities creating areas where people could argue vast differences in opinion, today speech is controlled or even canceled if it makes anyone uncomfortable. In political discourse, those we disagree with are no longer just incorrect, they are stupid or to those on the left, racist and on the right, pariahs. How do we ever find solutions that will be accepted by both sides as long as we all can't get passed labels and name calling. These tendencies are exacerbated by media and social media who emphasize and even create conflict to generate followers. One side is becoming immune to the attacks, while the other finds itself wrapped up in fear. Fear is a critical response to imminent danger; it keeps us alive. But fear over issues and activities that have a minimal chance of ever affecting a person cripples their ability to deal with issues rationally.

In a recent get together the author found himself surrounded by that fear. Fear that COVID would be the death of participants or loved ones. Fear of what the media labeled racist social structure that made some victims and others perpetrators just because

of their skin. Fear of anyone who owned a gun. When discussing the get together with a conservative friend, her response was to discredit each of these feelings, but that does not help alleviate the concerns of those living in fear, for those concerns have become their truth.

“Fear is a reaction; courage is a decision.”

—Winston Churchill

The author began looking at the overly simplified platitudes, slogans, and memes popular today. This research began as our community began discussing an upcoming political race for a congressional seat. In the race, a long seated Republican incumbent was facing challenges from right and left. On the right is a young man, from the family of a former Blue Dog Democratic congressman. (Blue Dog here means a traditional labor oriented, national security conscious, Democrat who believes in Free Enterprise and the Constitution and fights to make sure working men and women share in its bounty.) He has labeled a sitting congressman who has been reelected as a Republican more than a dozen times as an apologist of the liberal movement. The congressman’s failures included supporting the economy of this state. On the left is a sitting city assembly member who accuses the challenger from the right of, “more extreme right-wing messaging.” Adding “That kind of thinking cannot be the center of this campaign. We can’t drive more to the right, or we’re going to fall off the edge of the flat world.” Really, just because someone has different political views, they are pre-renaissance dupes.

This same kind of rhetoric is exploding across the country. It takes little for some to be negatively labeled as socialists and communists. Those who come from the other extreme consider anyone who disagrees with them uneducated, anti-science, racist Neanderthals. Here are a few of our most concerning slogans.

LEFT	RIGHT
White Male Privilege	White Power
Pro Choice	Pro Life
“My fear is that if North Korea nukes us, Trump is going to get us into a war.”	In Africa some idiot shoots a lion and it’s the Shooter’s fault; in America one person shoots another and it’s the gun’s fault.
Basket of Deplorables	LIBERALS: people waiting on someone to tell them what to be offended about next.
Question: What do you call 242 Republicans in one house? Answer: Useless	I just love being cussed out and bullied by Leftists for not being as tolerant as they are.
The only people who don’t accept the theory of evolution are those who have not yet themselves begun the process.	It’s nuts; you have to show your vaccination card to get into a restaurant, but it’s impossible to ask for ID when voting.
I wish more people cared about the earth as much as they care about who they believe created it.	Snowflake
GOP = greed over people	Let’s go Brandon

Political sloganeering has been part of American political campaigns since the time of the founding fathers. Some slogans have been nuts. For example, in 1928, Al Smith, Democrat, ran for President on the slogan, “let your wet dreams come true.” He was speaking about ending prohibition, but the slogan was not

well received. He lost, and the slogan took on new meaning over the decades. Today sloganeering has become part of everyday life. Campaigns never end. It appears that social media would dry up without the vitriol. (Just had the thought, maybe that would be just fine.) And the nastiness and demeaning of the ‘other side’ just inflames the public. With that said, our research shows that much of the disagreement stems from three issues.

- Few people today really know why, on what issues, with which concerns and limitations the nation was founded. Students today learn what the Constitution is, even that it replaced the weak ‘articles of confederation.’ But they do not learn how applies to society or even to themselves; what does liberty mean to me.
- Liberals think we should be equal at the finish line, while conservatives think we should be equal at the starting line. People do not understand the basics of the economy.
- Much of what we now call history has become a debate that begins with favored conclusions and then sorts through what happened in the past to find only those moments that prove that conclusion. What each of us learns from almost any moment in history is open to interpretation. But history itself is not there for us to like or dislike, it is there to learn from.

Your tribe has always hurt my tribe. Your tribe is lazy. All your tribe cares about is money.

Just nuts.

With this opening, I set out to write this book, a student of my own educational disciplines and of American history, to see if I could do anything that addressed the naivety and vitriol of America today. I would write the book while Dave offered support, scientific background, and criticism. The PhDs on both sides write a book read by people who already believe what they believe, get inter-

viewed the next week and change no opinions. Neither of us work for Fox News or OAN. Neither of us is enamored by Facebook, CNN, or MSNBC. Instead, we are what we believe the nation needs most, fairly common men. People whose observations and study are of other regular citizens. All of the time and energy to write this book is the author's, with no compensation from groups trying to prove anything. To some who start reading, the tone of this book may seem politically charged. It is. I am personally deeply concerned about where the country is heading but acknowledge that the issues are complex and there is strong emotion on each side. The book contains a lot of facts, including a lot of detail on society. It has all been checked and double checked, but I am not writing as an academic expert, so those of you who might question sections of the book should feel free to research those issues yourself. I am not including citations since one of the main goals of this project is to entice those with strong feelings to dig a little deeper.

My own bias will come through in the manuscript. I have enough grey hair to have lived through the Civil Rights Turmoil of the 1960's, the anti-war turmoil of the 1970's, the energy crises of the Arab Oil embargo and three wars. I have no friends who have made no mistakes, none who don't have skeletons in their closet. America is and will always be one of my best friends and like my human friends it has a checkered past but somehow always improved.

Thinking through how to open this book, the author was constantly drawn to the book, *Common Sense*, by Thomas Paine, a short pamphlet printed in the 1770's. In *Common Sense*, Paine laid out the argument for the creation of the United States of America. In this book, I lay out why those reasons are still valid and why the social-economic-political model laid out two and a half centuries ago is still the best model to remedy today's differences. But that is only valid if you know the model and if you apply it equally and persistently across the country. It is only true if we all agree about what needs fixing and quit fighting about how to fix it.

I'd like to call those who embrace the findings, NATURAL AMERICANS; a description that came from Dave. That doesn't mean that there will not be other ideas, only that the people who founded the nation, built the nation, then fought for its very existence and sacrificed for it created a model that will work for all of us. So why isn't it as effective today as in the past? Bluntly, because we quit following it. In an era of instant gratification, we have lost our patience, lost an awareness that social and economic trends are not as simple as posting inflaming social media posts and getting followers. Nor is it as simple as discrediting others because they don't look like us.

One final disclosure before we launch *Still Common Sense*. In the first year after it was founded, the Smithsonian Museum of Black History put on its website what they called, ASPECTS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF WHITENESS AND WHITE CULTURE.

This post was to layout the ways white people and their traditions are now considered standard practices in the United States, somehow hurting people of color. Listed among the White Aspects are:

RUGGED INDIVIDUALISM - The individual is the primary unit; Self-reliance; independence and autonomy highly valued and rewarded; individuals assumed to be in control of their environment.

FAMILY STRUCTURE - The nuclear family: father, mother, children is the ideal social unit; Husband is the primary breadwinner and head of household; Wife is homemaker and subordinate to the husband; Children should be independent

EMPHASIS ON SCIENTIFIC METHOD - Objective, rational linear thinking; cause and effect relationships; quantitative emphasis.

HISTORY - Based on Northern European immigrant experience in the United States; heavy focus on the British Empire; the primacy of Western (Greek, Roman) and Judeo-Christian tradition.

PROTESTANT WORK ETHIC - Hard work is the key to

success; work before play; if you didn't meet your goals, you didn't work hard enough.

The website went on to discuss religion, status, power and authority, future orientation, time, aesthetics, holidays, and justice. Each of these sections addresses additional aspects of what they call Whiteness. For example, under future orientation, it lists, "plan for the future; delayed gratification; progress is always best; tomorrow will be better." The museum's presentation was a bit dated.

I include this because, except for the section on family structure, where the author's wife would certainly "revise" the hypothesis, the rest of the outline largely describes how the author has lived his life. Whether it is from culture and habits of their own ethnic groups or what society now calls "Cultural Appropriation," it is how most Americans live their lives.

That term, cultural appropriation, to me, is an oxymoron in a nation and society that is built on people from all over the world and every ethnicity. How crazy to criticize fellow citizens for adopting, treasuring, and displaying the cultures of fellow citizens. You won't see me trashing the bicameral legislative system drawn from Native Americans, R&B, belief in faith, Blues and resilience from Black Americans, Sushi, intense belief in discipline and belief in education from Asian Americans. My Latina wife, a city girl, and I listen to Carlos Santana and Linda Ronstadt with our Tacos. We have one room in our home she calls the Barrio Art Gallery, with art from modern Latin artists. I love it and she appreciates our den with Western wildlife art. We love New Orleans because it is a true melting pot. Oh, and we do those White things noted earlier.

I want you to know where this book is coming from. But in order to really evaluate the current social construct, I underwrote a survey looking for the opinions of other Americans, paying special attention to those who label themselves differently. Most would call me moderately conservative or Libertarian. The results of that survey are in chapter one of the book.

I am Rodger, a political scientist, businessman and writer. I've spent years studying American and world political history. I've worked in countries across the globe, and write historical fiction, usually based on some screwup or miscalculation that was covered up by the powerful. I am dumbfounded by watching how the very things that have made America successful are now under attack. Two favorite quotations fit here:

“People have to think, that’s not to agree or disagree, that’s voting.”

—ROBERT FROST

“Honest disagreement is often a good sign of progress.”

—MAHATMA GANDHI

Both Dave and I were surprised to find that the other was contemplating a book. Rodger was focused on economic, social, and political disagreement but was struggling to find a single unifying human model as an explanation. Dave had been gathering notes for years on what he believed were natural human traits, truths that explained both successful enterprise and damaging behavior. Both believed that American citizens (and other people) have a responsibility to first do no harm to their fellow citizens. Both believe that society only works if we live up to our agreements with others. Both believe the American Dream is alive and well but acknowledge that a lot of citizens don't even understand that term. The USA was the first nation on earth that was conceived purely on the principles of individual liberty and freedom. But with great freedom and liberty, comes great responsibility.

It took several conversations to realize that what Dave referred to as the Natural American, a set of behaviors and responsibilities,

were just the unifying human model Rodger was looking for. It might work as a model for at least understanding our differences. America was born of conflict. It has never had a period where there was not substantial political disagreement. That is a critical difference to countries where people are manipulated or bluntly told what to do, to think. I write this as the Ukraine war rages, but my Russian friends, almost all of which have friends and relatives in Ukraine are told and believe that the war is about rooting out Nazis. The government and media are only allowed to tell the people what they want the public to hear. There has never been a time when American's didn't believe we have more in common than differences, until now. This book was born.

“If you feel pain, you are alive. If you feel other people’s pain, you are a human being.”

–LEO TOLSTOY

1

CITIZEN SURVEY ON AMERICAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES

A SURVEY AND meeting with Melody, a passionate, liberal person.

What the author had trouble wrapping his mind around, was that so much of the liberal/progressive media was so angry, so determined to reinvent America and so determined to blame especially those who are conservatives. My question, blame them for what? Where was America failing? How do conservative beliefs and values contribute to that failure? What is racist about the color of any person's skin? Was Martin Luther King wrong when he spoke to equality of men? How is the American economic system responsible for poverty? Why is equity for all superior to growing success for all.

Conservative media warped its message by justifying the behavior of hate groups and individuals. There is no justification for hate. Like the other side, much of their commentary has become "what I feel" instead of "what I know." Both sides manipulate their audience to promote an agenda, improve ratings, and attract revenues. Gone are the days of reporting an incident without labeling

someone. The people who made American Media News the envy of the world must be rolling over in their graves,

The author commissioned a 20-question survey to get some general understanding of how the public, who described themselves as progressive or liberal, really understand and feel about America, its founding documents, its economic system, economic classes, and their responsibilities. I used this tool as the liberals I attempted to have a conversation with refused to discuss their views if they felt our beliefs differed. The author was obviously uncaring, blind to victims.

I surveyed self-described conservatives by phone. They talked freely, but even some business colleagues shook when they found that we had different beliefs. The author was obviously an apologist.

Boy were both sides wrong.

I deliberately mixed up historic, economic, and social questions to avoid respondents offering hyped policy instead of their personal views. I guaranteed that the responses would be confidential and stripped of names before tabulation. I released the survey in phases, to look at diverse groups. (For example, we sent one batch to only elected officials.) We offered the earliest respondents a gift certificate to either Amazon or Barnes and Nobel as a reward for prompt responses. I planned to discard any responses that were profane or demeaning and heard none. (I deliberately did not include media personalities.)

In order to guarantee anonymity, the author hired out the tabulation, in fact, I haven't even asked for how many respondents, from which groups, responded. The tabulators were paid in cash to compile the results. Their reports did not include the names of the tabulators.

The survey asked that the respondents be as concise as they could in their answers. Some offered one or two sentence answers. Others felt a need to explain their responses. From the compilation, I created a composite answer, seeking midpoints in the

liberal responses, which turned out to be a relatively simple task as so many of the responses were common. Most of the responses could have been picked from waves of comments on social media.

Below are the questions and composite answers to the progressive survey.

Composite Answers

1. HOW DO YOU VIEW YOUR POLITICAL BELIEFS?

80% of the respondents defined themselves as “liberal or left leaning,” while 20% chose not to say.

2. MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT AMERICA IS AN EXCEPTIONAL COUNTRY. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE IT?

“Beautiful, diverse, immature, confused. Exceptional in some individuals have more rights than others. America is both exceptional in the sense that there never has been nor ever will be any country quite like it, and nothing special in that the same is true for every country.”

3. DESCRIBE YOUR UNDERSTANDING AND FEELINGS ABOUT CAPITALISM.

“I don’t have a deep understanding of capitalism. Money has become the God of capitalists. Our job is to help each other, not profit off each other.”

4. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE CONSTITUTION TODAY?

“I don’t know for sure. Maybe it is the nation’s book of rules. People can change it, but it must be done legally. Still too many people feel ‘exceptional’, and the antiquated

Constitution represents an outdated fixed mindset that is preventing the country from progressing.”

5. WHAT IS WEALTH?

“An abundance, more than you really need, of material things; or to others contentment from friends, health, and enjoyment of nature.”

6. WHAT IS SOCIAL JUSTICE AND YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS IT?

“Social Justice is evenly distributed wealth, opportunities, and privilege; it is the counterforce to oppression and tyranny. My responsibility is to strive for a more perfect union, not just those with wealth, power and who look, or worship like me.”

7. WHAT IS ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS IT?

“Outlaw people inheriting the debt or wealth of their predecessors. Remove unjust barriers, and historic systems that have not adapted to contemporary society. Make sure financial and educational opportunities are fair.”

8. IS RACIAL EQUALITY AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE BETTER OR WORSE THAN 50 YEARS AGO?

80% of the respondents said better, while 20% said worse.

9. HOW DO YOU HELP THE NATIONS ECONOMY?

“Spending my money, mostly local and paying my taxes. I advocate for higher wages and benefits from employers and work within the community, especially with younger people and promote healthy investment choices.”

10. WHAT IS A CITIZEN? WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF A 'REAL AMERICAN?'

“A citizen is someone born in the USA or who has passed a citizenship test. A Real American follows the laws and respects the rights of others. They love America, accepting the great things, work to remedy its downfalls, and ensure America adapts to the times.”

11. IS GREAT INDIVIDUAL OR FAMILY WEALTH GOOD OR BAD FOR SOCIETY?

60% of the respondents feel wealth is bad, while 40% said it was good.

12. HOW DOES ONE IMPROVE THEIR PERSONAL OR FAMILY FINANCIAL SITUATION?

“Can that still be done today? Beats me, no seriously, get an education or skilled trade since those on minimum wage work their butts off and can't support a family. Maybe get a financial planner or win a contest or a lawsuit. Work hard, make smart choices and look for help if you need it. Some do not have the educational physical or mental ability to improve their situation.”

13. SOME JUDGES BELIEVE THEY NEED TO REINTERPRET THE CONSTITUTION. OTHERS BELIEVE THAT IF THE CONSTITUTION NEEDS REVISING IT SHOULD GO THROUGH THE AMMENDMENT PROCESS. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS?

“The evolution of society requires reinterpretation of the Constitution, and each new look should not require an amendment. However, even if the Constitution contains

antiquated concepts, it is the one legal consistent document and should not be open to individual interpretation.”

14. WHICH COMES FIRST, EQUALITY OR FREEDOM?

80% of respondents named equality and 20% said freedom.

15. WHICH COMES FIRST, RIGHTS OR OBLIGATIONS?

60% of respondents said obligations, while 40% said rights.

16. WHICH COMES FIRST, PRIVILEGES OR RESPONSIBILITY?

100% of respondents said responsibility.

17. WEALTHY SOCIETIES WITH MORE LIESURE TIME PRODUCE MORE ART, MUSIC, AND LITERATURE. IS THIS GOOD?

100% of the respondents said yes.

18. WHAT NATURAL LAWS INFLUENCE OR CONTROL THE BEHAVIOR OF MAN?

“Maybe belonging to a tribe, protect oneself and one’s resources. Or maybe simply eating, breathing, sleeping and the additional needs defined by our consciousness and interpersonal relationships.”

19. SOCIALISM SPEAKS TO DIVIDING PRODUCTION MORE EQUITABLY. IS THIS A GOOD MODEL? WHY?

“Generally, for medicine and education it is probably good. Maybe CEOs should not make insane pay and excess could go to workers. But I’m torn between share and share alike

and realizing some work at more difficult jobs and work harder and have prepared more and it would not be fair to pay them the same.”

20. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ‘ACTIONS BASED ON THINKING’ VERSUS ‘ACTIONS BASED ON FEELING?’

“Thinking actions would be based on facts, but only as gained from reliable sources. Feeling actions often are based on our personal experiences and may be objective or biased. Often decisions based on feelings lead us to jump to conclusions or are just emotional responses. You need to think before you act.”

I tried to conduct an earlier survey by phone, but the answers were so emotionally charged that a question like “which comes first, equality or freedom,” would elicit an answer like, “if you can’t see that equality is more important, there is no hope.” So, I went to our written questionnaire to solicit personal answers to how people really feel and not how they think we should feel.

While the survey was being conducted, I did a voice survey of conservatives. As in the solicitation list for liberal input, I again deleted media. Again, the responses were similar. Both liberals and conservatives are fairly locked in on their views. Overall, what I learned from the responses was that the conservatives and the liberals talk past each other, they don’t even agree on common definitions. Conservatives seemed to have a better grasp of the nation’s founding, documents, and actions. (By definition, conservative thinkers tend to rely on the past to craft their beliefs.)

The liberals were critical of perceived current situations and problems. Progressive thinking looks at today’s issues and wonder why they still exist. Some were openly hostile toward the founding fathers, evaluating them through the screen of today’s values.

(It is inconceivable to them that someone who had ever owned slaves could be a serious supporter of individual liberty.) The conservatives tended to have relatively simple ideas on problems and solutions. The liberal responses tended to reveal an impatience for solutions with few specifics. Conservatives tended to see few structural problems in our current society, while liberals appeared willing to see primarily institutional problems and were quick to assign blame. Liberals wanted someone, preferably government to fix problems, while conservatives asserted that only the people can do that. Remember the earlier observation, that there are more unknowns than knowns. Neither progressive nor conservatives discussed unknowns. Both were locked in by what they already know and weren't particularly interested in exploring unknowns.

One other thing surprised me from the survey of elected officials. On the conservative side, some granted a few minutes of telephone time to gain a brief understanding of their views. None wanted to complete a survey. None of the liberal leaning elected officials wanted to talk or return the online survey. Instead, we got feedback such as, "By allowing the two-party system to prevail, we set ourselves up for this;" and, "We will always have a divide...." Not much encouragement there.

So, the survey of liberal views is made up of common citizens, views solicited from a significant range of age groups and careers. I was interested in the responses, not a policy debate, and only wanted answers from those willing to offer personal responses.

From their responses, I developed consensus answers and from that hereby attributed them to our liberal avatar, Melody. What do we mean by liberal Avatar? The book is set up to reflect a conversation between myself one progressive/liberal person, a composite of those surveyed: an Avatar. I chose a woman Avatar as the women in the survey were by far more willing to discuss their personal views than the men, who generally just parroted talking points. As you read this, remember that Melody is just a name for an Avatar,

a composite person. If you are concerned about a liberal woman being chosen to represent those views, then feel free to change the Avatar's name to Lawrence or Tim. But in the survey, women provided more concise and well thought out responses than the men.

I want to listen to a concern and conduct a one-to-one conversation. I will break these conversations into four sections. First, a conversation about the American economy; (economic issues including taxation were the primary fuel for the American Revolution and current equality concerns.) Second, a discussion of history both before European presence in North America and up until the present. Third, I set out to openly discuss both historic and present societal pressures and the law. In the fourth section, I will attempt to lay out a Unifying Philosophy; that is a set of terms with agreed upon definitions, that can be applied to any set of facts or situation to at least allow us a civil discussion. These aren't rules, rather some ideas on how we avoid wasting time and energy on settled issues, (historical issues that cannot be changed, like slavery was bad) and focus on making lives better.

From this point forward, I would like to thank Melody for being part of this book and thank all of you who make up Melody for your responses. You all made your point and I acknowledge your concerns. I heard you.

Here is what I heard. Melody told me that she really doesn't understand how to go about improving her personal or family financial situation or that of others. She is focused on working hard, and making smart choices, and believes education helps. She commented on minimum wage issues and recognized that entry level pay today is inadequate to support a family. Maybe winning a lawsuit or hiring a financial planner helps. As to how she helps the economy as a whole, well she spends money, tries to spend it locally and promotes advocacy for higher wages and benefits especially among younger people. Melody is concerned that some people, because of mental or physical difficulties, may not be able to earn a living on their own. **It** isn't fair.

On the subject of wealth, Melody defined wealth as more than one's need of material things or other contentments. Sixty percent of the time, she felt that great individual or family wealth is bad for society, and yet felt that wealth creates the ability to produce more art, music, and literature, which she stated was very important. She felt that families passing on wealth to their children was generally a bad thing. Wealthy people only became wealthy by taking from less privileged.

When asked about capitalism versus socialism, Melody offered a mixed bag of thoughts. Generally, she acknowledged that she doesn't really understand capitalism. She finds that capitalists are focused on money instead of taking care of their fellow man. Her understanding of socialism is also limited, although she thinks it is a good idea for, maybe medicine and education. Here she is focused on CEO pay as basically unfair, but still believes that certain jobs, utilizing certain education or training are worth more than others especially those requiring more work. Government should take more from the wealthy, but how that might work is a question.

In general, her thoughts go quickly to what is fair. She believes that unjust barriers and historic systems that do not reflect contemporary society, need to be dismantled while we refocus on financial and educational opportunities for all.

In chapter five and six, I tackle the foundations of our social system, economic system, and government through a discussion of history. Melody seems to feel that those old white gentlemen who signed the Declaration of Independence, fought in the Revolutionary War, created the U.S. Constitution would be out of step with today's world and values. While most of the time she feels economic justice has improved over the last half century, sometimes she is disappointed. She described the nation as beautiful, diverse, immature, and confused. She sees our history as built around a concept of protecting the rights of some while limiting the rights of others. She is concerned about inequity. Her comment that there is

no other country quite like America, but it's nothing special in that the same is true for every country, indicates that she sees nothing really exceptional in the country.

In Chapter 7, I want to discuss our society under the law with Melody. Her views on The Constitution indicate that she isn't quite sure what the role of the document is today. She sees it as a book of rules that are subject to reinterpretation but at the same time believes that any changes must be done legally through the amendment process. (Conservatives tend to accept societal rules and focus on working within them for needed change.)

Her understanding is based on a strong belief that equality is more important than freedom. To many, people feel 'exceptional' because the antiquated Constitution represents an outdated fixed mindset that is preventing the country from progressing. A more perfect union would be one where privilege extends to all, not just those with wealth and power or who look... look what? Look white or live in big homes, or are athletes or performers, she's not sure.

Melody generally believes that obligations come before rights but not always, in fact, the term rights is pervasive in most of her comments. Responsibilities always comes before privileges. She believes that there are natural laws that control man's behavior such as belonging to a tribe, or protecting yourself, or your resources. We all need to eat and breath and sleep, but our consciousness and interpersonal relationships also are critical to our behavior. She believes actions need to be based on critical thinking backed up by facts. Too often, decisions based on feelings lead to jumping to conclusions. I also believe there are controlling natural laws.

In summary, Melody is really critical of America, of society, but doesn't really understand why the nation is as it is. She fervently believes that things can be better with greater opportunity for all. Melody would choose two words that describe her concerns, equality and fair.

First, I support and encourage Melody in her concerns for

others. I agree that things can be better for her and others. America's citizens need to seize greater opportunity for all. The nation was conceived on the concept of liberty and equal rights for all. Capitalists are focused on money. The Constitution is a 'book of rules' and more, it lays out the guiding principles for the American society. I agree with Melody's wide perception that things are not right in America.

With that opening, I also believe that things are not all wrong with America. Many of Melody's concerns stem from three areas. First, she sees The Constitution, America's book of rules as out of step with current society, needing either revision or reinterpreting. I will have a conversation with Melody about that Constitution, believing that a lot of things might be better if we actually followed the Constitution again. Second, Melody looks at inequity as a negative. Here again, I would like to discuss the differences between equity and equal rights, and how obligation plays into that thought. Third, Melody sees the economy as unfair, with exceptional wealth for some and poverty for others. Here I believe that much of the problem lies in how few of America's citizens even understand our economic system. It is no longer taught in school; rather it has been replaced with simple sloganeering. Economic issues are complex, but how the system works is not. (As stated, this educational failure is an absolute, but I know that across the country many teachers still offer comparative economic study, that is if the lesson police, the curriculum coordinators in their schools allow it.) Many educators struggle to promote career choices with dirty fingernails. I understand Melody's focus on equality and fair but believe that before either of these can become the national norm, the people of this country need to focus on liberty and opportunity.

Moving into the discussion; the American economy has created the highest overall standard of living in the world. This is remarkable as it is the only major economy built around a really diverse

population. All other highly successful economies are in countries with mostly homogenic populations with common history and language, for example Japan and Sweden. I want to have a direct conversation about that economy; how American history and its founding created a model for success and how we have reinterpreted that history to our detriment. Were traditional cultures trampled along the way, for example native American, yes. Did they evolve, yes. Are they part of who we are now, yes. American society and our legal system create a blueprint for success if we all just understood it. It also offers opportunity to redress injustice.

But before I can move to those discussions, Melody should know what I consider is the American success story. It is the story of the founding and building of a remarkable nation. It is the story of individuals, I'll call them Natural Americans, who built a nation, sometimes directing government to help, but more often in spite of government. It is an ongoing story, not one that history will ever call complete. It is the story of individual people not of institutions. It is her story and mine, ours. Let's see how, together, we can improve this work in progress and make a better America.

You cannot bring about prosperity by discouraging thrift.

You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong.

You cannot help little men by tearing down big men.

*You cannot lift the wage earner by
pulling down the wage payer.*

You cannot help the poor by destroying the rich.

You cannot establish sound security on borrowed money.

*You cannot further the brotherhood of
man by inciting class hatred.*

*You cannot keep out of trouble by
spending more than you earn.*

*You cannot build character and courage by
destroying men's initiative and independence.*

*And you cannot help men permanently by doing for
them what they can and should do for themselves.*

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE NATURAL AMERICAN

*A discussion about Natural Americans
and their belief system*

AS NOTED IN the preface, Dave has developed what he calls a theory of Natural Americans. As he began explaining it to me, he used several personal stories, and I believe that is a good way to open this section. As you read this section, ask yourself, does this apply to me?

Here is Dave's foundation story.

“Chest puffed, feet spread, his five-year-old finger stabbing up toward the smirking face of his towering cousin, he snarled, YOU ARE NOT THE BOSS OF ME. Simple, resolute, and matter of fact.

My boy was never taught this but there it was, a deep and thorough knowledge that he owned himself and he alone would determine what was in his best interest, at least until he crossed an out of bounds line that would lead to punishment.

He was never given a menu to choose his own behavioral characteristics. That was done for him through generations of his ancestors, men and women who stuck their fingers in the face of