

AMERICAN STORIES



Sources of our Greatness

DAVID CLAIRE JENNINGS

American Stories

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Also by David Claire Jennings:

Slaves, Saints and Soldiers

The American – A Man's Life

After Bondage and War

Hanna's Promise: A Story of Grace and Hope

Collected Essays on Americanism

The Men Who Gathered Together – An Early History of SURC

The Scots, Ulster Scots and Irish (a brief history)

My Soul, Oh My Soul (published on www.davidclairejennings.com)

Collected Stories of My Family (privately published)

The Goodness of Alzheimer's (a booklet)

The Couple Now and Then (a stage play)

Dedication

Whenever ye may be found, may ye be of stout heart, kind soul and brilliant mind, restore America to honor, integrity, goodness and the light of hope to the world, as ye had done in the beginning, for love of God and country.

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Introduction

Reading our history and literature has provided me a constant treasure trove of thought and ideas about America and its people.

The words on the plaque at the base of the Statue of Liberty in New York are lines from the poem, "The New Colossus." written by Emma Lazarus in 1883. They say, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door." This is not a welcome; it is a promise.

Our American exceptionalism in part is that we have most likely the greatest representation of all the peoples of the earth of any country, starting with our own indigenous people who, immigrants themselves, crossed a temporary ice bridge from Siberia thirteen thousand years ago.

And so they came over the centuries, the explorers (Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French), the settlers (English, Irish, Scottish, Germans, Italians, Polish, eastern Europeans, Africans, Asians), from our north and south and all corners of the globe.

The enduring land, as Lincoln had described it, was dissected by rivers, easy to be crossed and soon to be populated along their shores of commerce. The coasts had their natural ports and were built up where inlets and bays protected them from the raging oceans. The forests provided shelter for the peoples and the beasts. The mountains and valleys gave America its grandeur, its beauty and inspired our imagination. The vast prairies gave us the spaciousness to breathe free, work hard, cultivate, feed ourselves, survive and prosper. The deserts brought us breathtaking diversity of geography.

But Washington had warned us of political factions that would divide us. He was thinking of differences in our people from vast geographical interests and chastened us to love one another and cooperate together – north and south, east and west.

Today our abundant diversity has shifted us from the great melting pot to a salad bowl where homogenous feeling as a nation is no longer possible. We are a hundred cultures viewing each other with distrust and hatred. Past sins, pain and suffering are not forgiven. Cohesiveness only brings us together in moments of catastrophic events – manmade or natural.

Our everyday lives are driven by self-interest. No country or government can function when men do not act in good faith.

As a civilization we are arguably a young country of just four hundred years. Yet, compared to older civilizations, we have changed faster and more chaotically; imperfect but perfectible. Our compass must be our lessons from our past.

The facts, events, changes to our land and peoples of our past are now well known to be true. The whys of their actions are also well understood even while we may view that with different perspectives that require further understanding from the lens of the present, but with respect and dignity for all those of the past.

Every school child and cub reporter is taught that a story must contain the who, what, when, where and why. We have answered the easy ones. The why remains complex and nuanced.

Why does our ideology kill masses of our citizens while giving us Martin Luther King, Jr.? Why does our science fly rockets to the moon and create hydrogen bombs?

My previous books, my novels and particularly *Collected Essays on Americanism*, 3rd edition, had described our history and our

nature. This one points out how we became what we are and perhaps suggests unspoken solutions based on what we once were.

Some were immigrants and some were heroes. They were all great Americans. Upon this land we developed as a nation of people. Here in this collection are some of the stories of us.

David Claire Jennings