

CHAPTER 13

A GLOBAL CALLING

Eager advocates of the young republic expected the United States to quickly gain a level of respect on the western world's stage. Victims of repressive regimes now looked across the Atlantic for their example of leadership and hope.

It would not be long before the brazen newcomer that had fearlessly taken on and defeated the world's most powerful empire would be expected to replace it. To repressed peoples still mired in poverty, longstanding regional and religious rivalries and divisive political and tribal factions, free America offered a model for the way out. The architects of this new paradigm quickly learned that global leadership is a beast not to be resisted as much as tamed.

The growing temptation to lose focus would pose serious challenges to a people finally free to flex their intellectual muscle and capitalize on an emerging prominence. Would-be friends will seek to take advantage of their political youth and inexperience while enemies will focus on undermining every achievement; each weakness or misstep will be skillfully exploited and courage will constantly be tested.

From the very beginning, then, the United States was destined to assume a role of leadership, a global calling if you will. Inattention, self-absorption, isolationism, abdication of that calling—or failure, over time, to exercise it—would be problematic, not just for America but for the burgeoning free world.

Thanks to the tenacity and cautious confidence of that first generation we've each inherited a proud national identity and enduring legacy. Our founding fathers envisioned, anticipated and even assumed that legacy.

In these pages you will read how their vision bred, empowered and, ultimately, secured it.

DAY 165

PATRICK HENRY

"Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot?"

*Remarks to the Virginia House of Burgesses, Saint John's Church,
Richmond, Virginia, March 23, 1775*

Today Mr. Henry might say:

Will indecision and weakness make us stronger? Will we discover our courage begging from our knees, clutching an imaginary hope, until we're hauled off in handcuffs?

DAY 166

GEORGE WASHINGTON

"The nation which indulges towards another an habitual hatred, or an habitual fondness, is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or to its affection, either which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest."

Farewell Address, Fraunces Tavern, New York, September 17, 1796

Today President Washington might say:

A nation that allows itself to either keep hating or agreeing with another nation has, at some level, enslaved itself. Whether it becomes a slave to its own loathing or its own compassion, either extreme is enough to distract it from its obligations and priorities.

DAY 167

GEORGE WASHINGTON

"In a word, I want an American character, that the powers of Europe may be convinced we act for ourselves and not for others; this, in my judgment, is the only way to be respected abroad and happy at home."

To Patrick Henry, October 9, 1775

Today General Washington might write:

Simply put, we need a distinctly American character. That's how European nations will know that we act in our own best interests, not for the appeasement of others. I believe that's the only way we'll be respected abroad and contented at home.

DAY 168

ROBERT GOODLOE HARPER

"Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute."

Speech upon the return of John Marshall negotiating for peace with France following the XYZ Affair, June 18, 1798

Today Representative Harper might say:

We will pay whatever we have to to finance our own defense but we'll never surrender protection money to foreign tyrants!

DAY 169

THOMAS JEFFERSON

"I hope also that the recent results of the English will at length awaken in our Executive that sense of public honor and spirit... and will establish the eternal truth that acquiescence under insult is not the way to escape war."

To Henry Tazewell, September 13, 1785

Today Ambassador Jefferson might write:

I also hope that the latest [military] venture of the English will eventually inspire in our president that sense of American honor and spirit and will demonstrate the timeless truth that war can't be avoided by surrendering to aggression.

DAY 170

ALEXIS DE TOQUEVILLE

"No protracted war can fail to endanger the freedom of a democratic country."

Democracy in America, Vol 2, Chapter XXII, 1840

Today M. de Toqueville might write:

Any war that goes on and on will eventually threaten the freedom of a self-governing nation.