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EC57-509 The Family Tree of American Liberty

Ethel H. Saxton

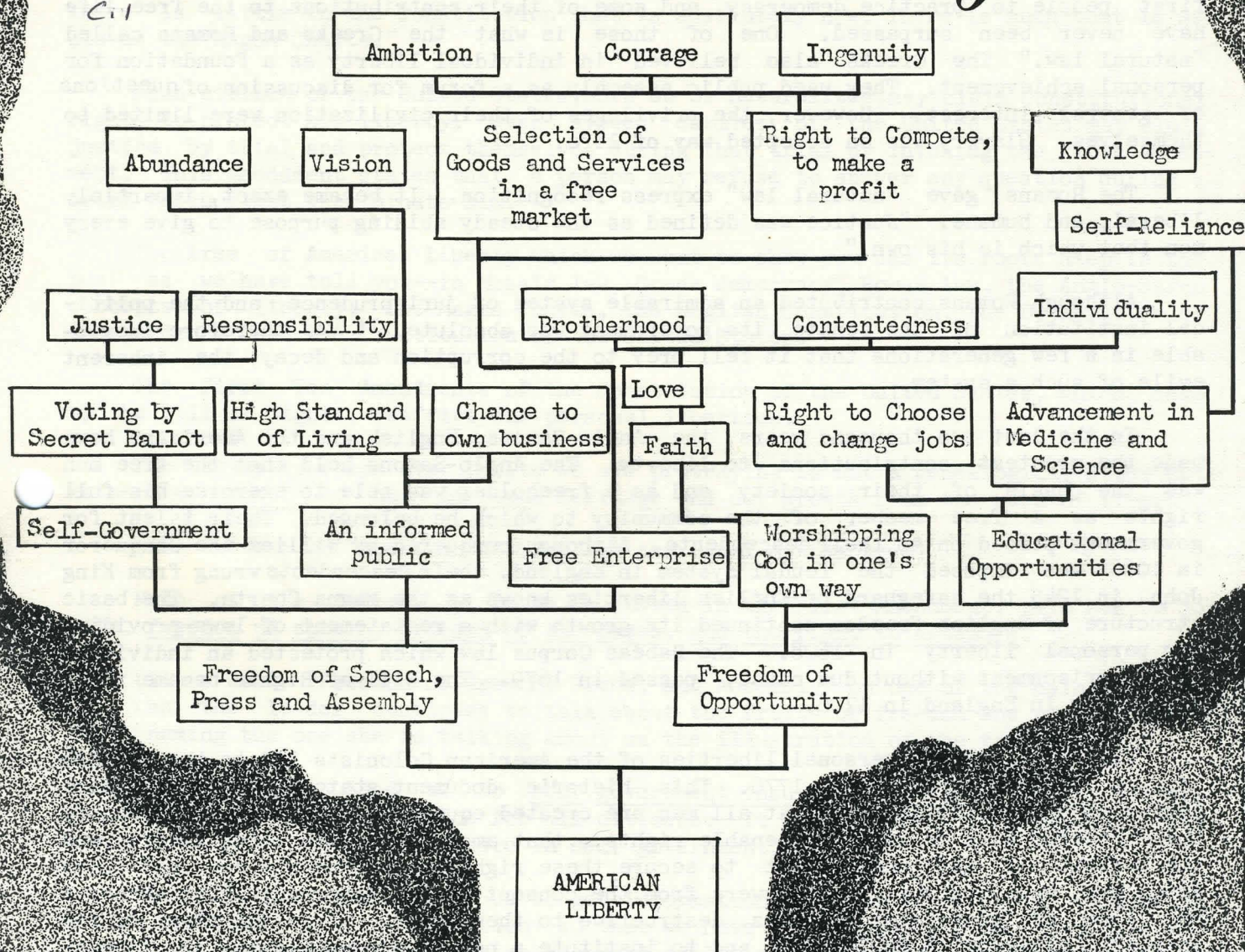
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THE FAMILY TREE OF AMERICAN LIBERTY

By Ethel H. Saxton, District Supervisor, Home Agents

Many nations have contributed to the noble traditions of liberty to which the American people have fallen heir. The ancient Greeks valued liberty. They were the first people to practice democracy, and some of their contributions to the free life have never been surpassed. One of those is what the Greeks and Romans called "natural law." The Greeks also believed in individual liberty as a foundation for personal achievement. They used public assembly as a forum for discussion of questions of general interest. However, the privileges of their civilization were limited to themselves. Slavery was an accepted way of life.

The Romans gave "natural law" express recognition. It became exact, impartial, liberal, and humane. "Justice was defined as the steady abiding purpose to give every man that which is his own."

Although Romans contributed an admirable system of jurisprudence and the political institution of the senate, its government was absolute. It was therefore inevitable in a few generations that it fell prey to the corruption and decay, the inherent evils of such a system.

In the last two thousand years, the Anglo-Saxons, English and the Americans have made the greatest contributions to liberty. The Anglo-Saxons held that the free man was the basis of their society and as a freeholder was able to exercise his full rights as a free member of the community to which he belonged. Their talent for government passed on to their descendants. Although conquered by William the Conqueror in 1066 who imposed the feudal system in England, their descendants wrung from King John in 1245 the safeguard of English liberties known as the Magna Charta. The basic structure of English freedom continued its growth with a restatement of laws providing for personal liberty in 1628. The Habeas Corpus law which protected an individual from imprisonment without due cause, passed in 1679. The Bill of Rights became fundamental law in England in 1708.

Violation of the personal liberties of the American Colonists led to the Declaration of Independence July 4, 1776. This historic document stated: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

Thereafter followed a long list of ways in which the King of England had violated the personal liberties of the American Colonists. This historic document concluded with a declaration of independence from Great Britain, and the American Revolution had begun.

In 1789, the Constitution of the United States became the basic law of the land. Our Constitution is the most notable and comprehensive bulwark of liberty that the world has ever known. James Bryce, the great English expositor of the Constitution wrote: "The American Constitution is no exception to the rule that everything which has the power to win obedience and respect of men must have its roots in the past and the more slowly the institution has grown, so much more enduring is it likely to prove. There is little in the Constitution that is absolutely new. There is much that is as old as the Magna Charta."

Each citizen of the United States, born so or naturalized, may claim Constitutional rights to protect his liberty. Even avowed enemies of the United States may claim justice by trial and protect themselves during that trial by invoking the Fifth Amendment. This amendment states that a person may refuse to answer any question during a trial which might incriminate him.

The tree of American Liberty which we want to show you has its roots deep in the past as we have told you--in Mosaic law, Greek democracy, Roman law, the Anglo-Saxon concepts of liberty, the Magna Charta, the English Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution of the United States.

The first Ten Amendments of the Constitution of the United States, which make up the Bill of Rights, reaffirm our personal liberties.

The family tree and its fruits we are portraying is not a genealogical study but rather a symbol of our American heritage and our growth from the seed of liberty.

(Place the sign "American Liberty" at the trunk of the tree)

Much of the liberty we prize is stated in the First Amendment; this has to do with, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to assemble.

(Place card "Freedom of Speech, Press, and Assembly" on one of the main branches as the leader continues to talk about the fruits of freedom she places a card naming the one she is talking about on the illustration of the tree)

These freedoms lead us to self government insured by voting by secret ballot. This also results in justice for all citizens. It also concerns the responsibility every one has to vote and to share in self government.

These freedoms also permit us to get information by newspapers, radio, television public meetings, public education so that we have an informed public. A people who have, for the most part, a high standard of living and through public education we believe have a right to this standard. Our citizens have a right to have the chance to own business which becomes successful through vision and brings to them and to those who assist them abundance.

These freedoms also permit free enterprise which allows everyone the selection of goods and services in a free market. They also permit the right to compete to make a profit, which we believe encourages personal qualities in citizens of ambition, courage, and ingenuity.

So used are we to the ways of freedom that we need to step back and see how "freedom of opportunity" allows us to act.

(Place card "freedom of opportunity" on one of main branches as leader talks about fruits of these freedoms; she places a card about the one she is talking about on the illustration of the tree)

This freedom is specifically stated and one we have jealously guarded. It permits worshipping God in one's own way and gives us the chance to grow in ways of love and faith and leads us to believe in brotherhood, contentedness and to respect the individuality of every person.

This freedom has been responsible for our system of public education of which the Extension Service is a part. It allows for educational opportunities. This gives everyone the right to choose and change jobs. It has encouraged advancement in medicine and science and has led to knowledge and self reliance.

To continue to enjoy the fruits of "The Family Tree" we must --

1. Fight the pests of alien ideas which feed upon the leaves and blight the fruits.
2. Trim and cut away the dead branches of false or outworn ideas, so leaves can reach for the light of truth.
3. Combat the dry rot of indifference, and the worms of insecurity and fear which gnaw at the roots.
4. Sun our tree with the warmth of faith and understanding, feed it with refreshing rains of vision and courage.
5. Nurture the roots with active citizenship for strong self-government.
6. Maintain a favorable climate of free private enterprise to insure strong economic growth -- more jobs, more products, a higher standard of living.

IN AMERICA "THE FAMILY TREE" HAS GROWN AND CHANGED AND SPREAD
... BUT THE SEED IS LIBERTY