

PHILANTHROPY AND PATRIOTISM

As far as I know, the first person to use the words "philanthropy" and "patriotism" together was Alexander Hamilton. Writing in the first of The Federalist papers in October of 1787, Hamilton made - the point that Americans have a collective interest in making the new democracy succeed.

That's what he meant by patriotism. But the American experiment in democracy was also destined to become a model for the rest of the world, and all humanity would benefit from our success. That's what he meant by philanthropy.

Patriotism is about what we share and value most highly as citizens. Philanthropy is about our concern for others as well as ourselves not only as citizens but as humans. The argument here is that true patriotism and true philanthropy complement, strengthen, and deepen each other. They need each other.

Patriotism is in jeopardy for two reasons. The first reason is that love of the fatherland or the mother country has been so abused by zealots and extremists that reasonable people have come to fear rather than respect it. Philanthropy should help us realize that patriotism is also needed in times of peace. A second reason emerges from the difficulty we're having these days trying to balance unity and diversity. The things we share weaken while the things that divide us prosper.

In the United States we share an inherited tradition of voluntary service and voluntary giving. Although philanthropy is universal and appears in all societies, the United States probably relies more extensively on voluntary associations to get the public business done than any society in the history of the world. More than half of all Americans 18 and over volunteer an average of 2.5 hours a week - that's almost a hundred million people donating services equivalent to four million full-time jobs. We are also generous with our money: Americans donated an estimated \$125 billion last year to charitable causes. All this voluntary service and voluntary giving flows through 983,000 voluntary tax-exempt associations. Philanthropy continues to permeate American life. It helps to shape the American character. It rivals the Constitution itself as our most distinctive virtue.

Philanthropy is not just another aspect of popular culture, like basketball, or the Indianapolis 500, or a Grateful Dead concert. Philanthropy is where we act voluntarily to relieve suffering and to improve the quality of life - not because we are required to by the government, not because we receive anything tangible as reward for what we do. In the former Soviet Union, voluntary associations had no clout at all, or were illegal and underground. Here, they are visible, often quite audible, and can't be ignored.

If there is reason for patriotic pride in our philanthropic tradition, there is also reason for humility ?even for occasional outrage or embarrassment. In such a vast array of activity, charlatans and scams turn up from time to time - and this decade appears to be one of those times. Philanthropy is not true to itself or to its mission simply because it declares itself to be SO. Philanthropy often appeals to our emotions and we are vulnerable to those

who would abuse good causes. (People who steal from charity and people who use charity to steal are the moral equals of people who sell drugs to children.)

In the face of depressing news about philanthropic abuses it is important to keep in mind that the philanthropic spirit was the conscience that brought an end to slavery in the 19th century; the philanthropic spirit was the conscience that brought the civil rights movement in the 20th century; and it is the philanthropic spirit that is the conscience telling us we still have a long way to go.

American democracy remains - one of the great social and political experiments of the world. If we strengthen and pass on the traditions of philanthropy and patriotism - of a patriotism infused by philanthropy the experiment will continue.