Until Philadelphia, the pursuit of happiness had never been granted such pride of place in a new scheme of human government—a pride of place that put the governed, not the governors, at the center of the project. Reflecting on the sources of the thinking on which he drew to draft the Declaration, Jefferson credited "the elementary books of public right . . . Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, & c."

To understand the Declaration, then, we have to start with Aristotle. Happiness, he wrote, is the end and the purpose of action—the whole point of life. It was an ultimate good, worth seeking for its own sake. Given the Aristotelian insight that man is a social creature whose life finds meaning in his relation to other human beings, Jeffersonian *eudaimonia*—the Greek word for happiness, which can also mean "flourishing"—evokes virtue, good conduct, and generous citizenship. Happiness in the ancient and American traditions is as much about the public weal as it is about an individual's endorphins.

As Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., once wrote, a broad understanding of happiness informed the thinking of patriots such as James Wilson ("the happiness of the society is the *first* law of government") and John Adams ("the happiness of society is the end of government"). Beginning with the Declaration of Independence, the pursuit of happiness—the pursuit of the good of the whole, because the good of the whole was crucial to the genuine well-being of the individual, and vice versa—became part of the fabric (at first brittle, to be sure, but steadily stronger) of the young nation. For Jefferson and his contemporaries—and, thankfully, for most of their successors in positions of ultimate authority—one of the main points of public life was to enable human creativity and ingenuity and possibility, not to constrict it. In *The Rights of Man*, his 1791–92 celebration of the centrality of the individual and of the possibilities of human endeavor, Thomas Paine wrote: "From the rapid progress which America makes in every species of improvement, it is rational to conclude that if the governments of Asia, Africa, and Europe had begun on a principle similar to that of America, or had not been early corrupted therefrom, that those countries must, by this time, have been in a far superior condition to what they are."

The progress of which Paine wrote and its enabling agents—reform and revolution—have deep philosophical and political roots. As traced by the Columbia sociologist Robert A. Nisbet, the idea that

human nature could advance is found as early as the Greek poets Hesiod and Xenophanes ("The gods did not reveal to men all things in the beginning," the latter wrote, "but men through their own search find in the course of time that which is better") and in the myth of Prometheus, who gave men fire. Beyond the pagan world, Saint Augustine spoke of life as a pilgrimage from darkness to light: "The education of the human race, represented by the people of God, has advanced, like that of an individual, through certain epochs, or, as it were, ages, so that it might gradually rise from earthly to heavenly things, and from the visible to the invisible."

For the American Founders, Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke, Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, the Marquis de Condorcet, and Adam Smith permeated the age with the hope that progress would be possible through inquiry, argument, agitation, and finally reform. At the Sorbonne in December 1750, Turgot articulated the doctrine of progress. "The whole human race, through alternate periods of rest and unrest, of weal and woe, goes on advancing, although at a slow pace, towards greater perfection," he said in the lecture later published as *A Philosophical Review of the Successive Advances of the Human Mind.* "Like the ebb and flow of the tide, power passes from one nation to another, and, within the same nation, from the princes to the multitude and from the multitude to the princes. As the balance shifts, everything gradually gets nearer and nearer to an equilibrium, and in the course of time takes on a more settled and peaceful aspect." Of the American Revolution, Turgot wrote: "America is the hope of the human race."

Reason, religion, and capitalism were the tributaries that met to form the powerful American river that so impressed Turgot and his contemporaries. By replacing revelation and hereditary authority with rationality and republicanism, the American nation gave political form to the idea that the divine rights of monarchs and prelates had to surrender to the primacy of individual conscience and equality. No longer would certain men, by an accident of birth (kings) or an incident of election (popes), be granted absolute power over the humblest of others. This view of the intrinsic equality of every person—or at least of nearly every propertied white man—drew on secular philosophical insights, the ethos of the Protestant Reformation, and the prevailing culture of the Scientific Revolution.

The rise of market economics was critical, too, for the ability to prosper by dint of one's own initiative created citizens with a stake in preserving and advancing the very society that had given them their chance. "Every man, as long as he does not violate the laws of justice, is left perfectly free to pursue his own interest his own way," Adam Smith wrote in *The Wealth of Nations,* "and to bring both his industry and capital into competition with those of any other man, or order of men." To those who worried that the prosperous would close the doors of opportunity behind them, Smith argued that by "pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it." Moreover, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* published in 1759, Smith wrote that "how selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it." In Smith's view, the human capacity for sympathy and fellow feeling could be as much a part of the nature of things as the desire for wealth, and this capacity was essential to the life of a republic.

Liberty itself, meanwhile, was dependent on the moral disposition of the populace. "Machiavelli, discoursing on these matters," Algernon Sidney, the seventeenth-century English theorist and politician, wrote, "finds virtue to be so essentially necessary to the establishment and preservation of Liberty, that he thinks it impossible for a corrupted People to set up a good Government, or for a Tyranny to be introduced if they be virtuous." Put another way, a republic is the sum of its parts. In the last instance, we are the state, and the state is us.

The formation, maintenance, and expression of individual opinion, then, is the motive force of American life, for that opinion will—sooner or later, for good or for ill—manifest itself in the shape and substance of politics. The things we hope for can come to pass; the things we fear can hold us back. "What the tender poetic youth dreams, and prays, and paints today, but shuns the ridicule of saying aloud," wrote Emerson, "shall presently be the resolutions of public bodies, then shall be carried as grievance and bill of rights through conflict and war, and then shall be triumphant law and establishment for a hundred years, until it gives place, in turn, to new prayers and pictures."



In a movement whose landmarks stretched from Seneca Falls in 1848 to the adoption of the women's suffrage amendment in 1920, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony argued against slavery and for equal rights for women.

Progress in America does not usually begin at the top and among the few, but from the bottom and among the many. It comes when the whispered hopes of those outside the mainstream rise in volume to reach the ears and hearts and minds of the powerful. Words attributed long afterward to Sojourner Truth, who spoke to a Woman's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, put the struggles of the day well: "I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon." And those voices carry the farthest when they call for fairness, not favors; for simple justice, not undue advantage. "We ask," Elizabeth Cady Stanton told the New York legislature in 1854, seeking equality for women, "for all that you have asked for yourselves in the progress of your development, since the *Mayflower* cast anchor [be]side Plymouth Rock; and simply on the ground that the rights of every human being are the same and identical." Arguing for black enfranchisement in 1867, Frederick Douglass said: "If black men have no rights in the eyes of white men, of course the whites can have none in the eyes of the blacks. The result is a war of races, and the annihilation of all proper human relations."



Born into slavery in Ulster County, New York, in the last years of the eighteenth century, Sojourner Truth escaped from bondage and became a stirring advocate for abolition and for the rights of women.

Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frederick Douglass: Their voices, articulating the feelings of innumerable others, ultimately prevailed in the causes of emancipation and of suffrage. It took presidential action to make things official—a Lincoln to free the slaves, a Wilson to support the women's suffrage amendment, a Lyndon Johnson to finish the fight against Jim Crow—but without the voices from afar, there would have been no chorus of liberty. The lesson: The work of reformers—long, hard, almost unimaginably difficult work—can lead to progress and a broader understanding of who is included in the phrase "We, the People" that opened the Preamble of the Constitution. And that work unfolds still.

At Gettysburg in the spring of 1963, the centennial year of President Lincoln's address at the dedication of the cemetery there, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson went to the Pennsylvania battlefield to speak at a Memorial Day commemoration. "One hundred years ago, the slave was freed," Johnson said. "One hundred years later, the Negro remains in bondage to the color of his skin. The Negro today asks justice. We do not answer him—we do not answer those

who lie beneath this soil—when we reply to the Negro by asking, 'Patience.'"

The country's fate, Johnson said, was intertwined with the country's sense of fairness. "Unless we are willing to yield up our destiny of greatness among civilizations of history, Americans—white and Negro together—must be about the business of resolving the challenge that confronts us now," he said. "Our nation found its soul of honor on these fields of Gettysburg one hundred years ago. We must not lose that soul in dishonor now on the fields of hate."

Five months and twenty-three days later, Vice President Johnson became President Johnson in a moment of tragedy and fear when John F. Kennedy, the president Johnson served, was shot to death in the streets of Dallas. On that autumn afternoon, in a crowded cabin aboard Air Force One at Love Field, with the fallen president in a coffin on board, Johnson took the oath of office and ordered the plane to take off for Washington. His mind whirring, the new president, always a man of action, did not believe he had a moment to waste.



Franklin D. Roosevelt and Lyndon B. Johnson in 1937, when LBJ was a young Texas congressman. Both believed in the transformative power of the presidency and sought to marshal federal power in the service of the excluded.

The battle that Johnson chose in the bleak closing weeks of 1963 was among the most difficult in American history. It was the unfinished work of the Civil War. To understand how the forces of fear had kept equality at bay for a century, and how Lyndon Johnson, an American president thrust to authority by assassination, fulfilled long-unmet promises, we must begin the story not in Dallas nor in Washington but in a village in Virginia called Appomattox Court House.