

Time for a New American Unification Renaissance

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I remember when we got the direction to return to our “hometowns” and make a tribal messiah foundation. Looking around the room, one sister spoke for many when she said, “I grew up in five or six towns and my parents were divorced – where do I go?”



America has been the home of the seekers of new opportunity and new adventures since its founding. Early settlers came for either God or gold, and sometimes both. The waves of immigration that have filled America with every language and color have been good to America. The bravest and brightest often end up here as opposed to staying in a confined homeland of limited possibilities.

Internal migration has been common in America: the story of the westward migration, the Gold Rush, the relocation of poor sharecroppers (black and white) to the Midwestern industrial areas, and now the hi-tech move to Silicon Valley and urban areas from the rustbelt. Many Americans who seek their hometown find that their parents moved to Florida to a trailer park with no room for three generations.

I am fortunate to have a hometown. I grew up on a dairy farm in a small town in upstate New York. I played on the local basketball team, went to the prom and knew the names of everyone in my class. My parents still live on the farm and my brother runs it. I recently returned to attend my nephew’s high school soccer game. One of my old teammates was the coach, most of the kids on the team were sons or nephews of my classmates. When my folks call, they usually spend some time catching me up on who died, who got married and how the local team is doing. I know more about the people in a fifteen mile radius of my parent’s house than I do about my two next door neighbors in suburbia. When Rev. Moon thought about hometown, it seems to me that these types of relationships was what he was thinking about.

Hometowns like this are the center of life, love and lineage. It is where I go when I need a break. If there is corn to plant, machinery to fix or barns to repair, that is therapeutic for me. I’m pretty open with my brothers and sisters about church politics and clash of East and West and how we overlap with my Catholic upbringing. They are pretty sure I’m bailing water on a sinking ship, but oddly enough, I am optimistic.

Why? Because I’m an American. We have always operated against ridiculous odds. The American Revolution was completely impractical. The country was to run by the common man — Yankee Doodle. If you have seen some of those alligator-hunting shows on TV – that was the common man. No wonder the British thought we were nuts. I assume King George was advised to let the colonies go for a while, because within a generation they would come crawling back looking for adult supervision.

This unusual optimism was noticed by Alexis de Tocqueville, a French aristocrat scholar and a student of revolutionary America. Wikipedia describes him as a critic of individualism, who thought that through associating, the coming together of people for mutual purpose, both in public and private, Americans would be able to overcome selfish desires, “making both a self-conscious and active political society and a vibrant civil society functioning independently from the state.”

When I read his book *Democracy in America*, I found he was amazed to attend a town meeting in New England, where after the discussion on town road repair, the meeting was adjourned, and everyone went home to get their horses and tools to fix the roads together. In France, the request would have been sent to Paris and all would wait to be told what to do.

In our American Unification movement our most successful and fruitful institutions have been the small locally-run institutions that keep the roots of the movement intact. Camp Shehaqua in Pennsylvania is an independent member-run family camp that has been in existence 20 years. There are many second generation Unificationists who credit their experience there as the reason they are still around. NextGen Academy in Seattle has produced some of the most innovative and creative second generation leaders. The BCSF Sports Fest was started and developed from interested individuals, not a direction from headquarters.

Many of the Unificationist schools around the country have been an amazing source of virtue for the movement. They are experiencing a shortage on second gen students, but have created such a good culture and track record that they are filling their classes with like-minded non-Unificationists until the third generation is ready.

Facebook and Listserv communities are our most dynamic and constructive areas of community now. The member-driven content is thoughtful, future-oriented and a source of strength and inspiration for many.

The Unificationist church communities around the country that are thriving often have things in common with de Tocqueville’s original observations. Additionally, they have good intergenerational cooperation, are self-funding, have functioning boards, and people feel empowered in decision-making. If the center or church needs painting, they don’t ask headquarters for money, they do it themselves.

The Natural American Tribe is a voluntary association of dues-paying members, who vote and decide for themselves what to do and how to get it done. They don’t wait for permission, they don’t ask for a handout, they just do it. If they are successful, they can be very helpful for larger efforts and national initiatives. The good thing about this type of tribal organization is that it doesn’t have to last forever and doesn’t have to be part of a large national organization. The leadership skills, the benefits to the participants, and the organizing, fundraising and operating skills are transferable to the next organization.

People who come from a more orderly society, the aristocracy in de Tocqueville’s case and traditional Confucianist order in our Unificationist experience, find this confusing and messy. Without a center point to relate to, they often feel that these organizations are out of control and uncivilized. For Americans, that is the whole point. The creativity and responsiveness to situational changes is America’s prime virtue. America’s ultimate gift to the world through the 20th century and into the future is the ability to manage the freedom, and often chaos, that accompanies the creative process.

Every healthy organization achieves a balance between the purpose of the whole and the purpose of the individual. During True Father’s lifetime, it made perfect sense to have a military-style focus on the spiritual conditions for the whole purpose. We will always need a headquarters to coordinate and communicate the providential concerns. However, now is a time for the pendulum to swing back and for a new American Unification Renaissance.

What does it mean to be the elder son nation? Should we be an exact copy of the father or the mother? A successful elder son or daughter incorporates the values and virtues of the parents, but not necessarily their style or methods. As an immigrant nation, many of our movies have a storyline where the parents come from the old county and want their kids to resist the new American environment. That tension can be healthy, or it can tear the family apart.

It is time for American Unificationists to get in touch with our natural American tribes. If you can’t find one, build one. The future is ours for the making.

John Redmond has served in CARP, AFC, and spent ten years in higher education in Colorado. He is the proud father of four interesting children, and has high expectations for the American Unification movement.