

PREFACE

When selecting the art to appear on the cover of this book, our publisher, Martin Scrivener, observed that he liked the painting selected, but wondered why we had chosen a picture of a boat sailing into the sunset.

In a nutshell, his question about the painting on the cover is the primary question of this book. Are we sailing into a sunset? Or, as is the case with the painting *Sunrise, Juniper Bay* by contemporary American artist M Kathryn Massey, wife of author Scott Massey, are we sailing toward sunrise? In the face of the dramatic changes around us—from globalization; new technologies; Islamic terrorism; natural disasters; social, cultural, and intellectual change—is America facing sunset or dawn?

The thesis of this book is that we face dawn. The book is an unabashed celebration of America and its promise. Our argument is that the core idea of the *Declaration of Independence*, grounded in the fundamental right of each person to the “pursuit of happiness,” is an inexhaustible mainspring of change and an anchor for hope. We aim to connect emerging global change with the pursuit of happiness and to show that change today is not only consistent with this principle, but in fact caused by it. We

believe a major shift is just beginning, a “tectonic shift” in human consciousness and life that will unfold from the dynamics of the pursuit of happiness. Far from portending cataclysmic ends, like “the death of God,” or the “death of humanity,” the end of language, or the degradation of ethics, politics, values and art into barbarity and banality, the enormous shift underway is a shift toward renewal and dramatic creative growth in all areas of spiritual understanding, economics, value, and life. We are not yet able to comprehend the final shape of this creative renewal. As a result, we tend to be more aware of what is ending, and this can create a feeling of foreboding.

We realize there are many who fear the changes underway and who do not share our sense of optimism and hope. We are also aware that there is a darker side of globalization, that many do not yet participate in benefits, and that globalization also links those who are disaffected in a global network, too. This is a moral issue to be taken seriously, but we do not believe it constitutes a counter-narrative or alternative to the pursuit of happiness. Because of these concerns and anxieties, we also attempt to uncover the roots of contemporary fears about the future and critics of America’s culture and society. We find that these efforts to create a critical, “counter-narrative” to that of the pursuit of happiness are based in ideas, either from Romanticism, or early modern rationalism. Often, the philosophical roots of these ideas are not consciously considered or examined. When brought to attention, it becomes clear that neither of these systems of thought is applicable in today’s world. It is time to reclaim the civic space that is too often held hostage by fear and by “civic vandals.”

A new renaissance is possible, if we choose to let go of these counter-narratives, take responsibility for civility and civic space, and align the many forces of change around a renewed, broadened, and intellectually charged affirmation of life and the pursuit of happiness. This is a project for a new generation of young leaders, to whom this book is primarily addressed. There is a great hunger for such a culture, as the proliferation of gurus, psychologists, radical religions, gangs, and “life style consultants” makes clear. Cultural leaders in America need to reclaim the territory being lost to such figures and to “philosophies” that are all too often shallow and unreflective. As the Scripture said, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

The *Declaration of Independence* distills a powerful, crystalline vision for our world. Its message resounds as loudly today as it did in the halls of Philadelphia some two hundred and thirty years ago. Go back and read it, even aloud, again. This book concerns the deeper meaning and importance of those framers intentions. It is about their pivotal phrase, “the pursuit of happiness,” which reminds us that the moral sentiments of a people matter.

For those of you who want a digested version that is intended to spur you on to action, we would take no offence if you turned to the back pages and considered, then acted on our “Thirty-Five Propositions. Nail them to you civic wall or the city hall door, if you like. This book is written in the hopes that it will spark a national dialogue about civil society, rooted in the humanities, and ultimately inspire a new

generation of humanistic leaders. Our argument evokes a version of the natural law, but its values and perspectives are thoroughly contemporary.

This is not an anti-American diatribe nor a volley in the fruitless “culture war” that has produced more heat than light. We aim for a reasoned and thoughtful analysis that is open to serious thinkers of all persuasions and points of view who are interested in constructive work. The only rule is that logic and reason guide dialogue, rather than expressions of taste and shrill emotion. We aim to provide an argument: *for* something. The book makes practical suggestions, brings up the subject of money, and has a deep appreciation for what we call spiritual capital and the ultimate humanism of commerce. This book is a resounding call for everyone in civic, governmental, and commercial life to renew our culture.

The question raised by our publisher and by this book, is of course classic. At the end of the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin, that archetypical American, observed that during the course of the debates over the formation of the new American government, he had mused on the sun carved on the back of the chair in which George Washington sat to preside over the convention. He said he had wondered many times through the ups and downs of the debate if the sun were a rising or a setting sun. In the end, he announced it was a rising sun.

It still rises.

