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The Promise of American Life

By Herbert David Croly

NOTE: I did not break this book out by chapters, just by Croly's thoughts. I did maintain his thoughts in the very same order he presents them in his book. Throughout you will see areas where I make personal comments, signified by the word NOTES. Whether you agree with my thinking or his, matters not. What is important is that you get a flavor for the man's thinking as it was in the early 1900's.

The object of the Jacksonian Democrat was to keep political power in the hands of the "plain people" and to forestall the domination of administrative and legislative specialists. The problem was that the common man could not give as much time to politics as could a new class of politicians who spent all their time in nominating and electing candidates.

The Bosses organized followers who supported him in return for favors and because he represented their most vital interests and satisfied their most pressing and intimate needs.

This alliance between the political machines and the big corporations was an alliance between two independent and coordinate powers. Neither one created the other. It was one founded on interest rather than association, on agreement and not subordination.

The large and continuous stream of foreign immigrants, whose standards of living were in the beginning lower than those which prevailed in this country, were particularly, in hard times, a constant menace to the advancement and stability of his economic situation; and he began to organize partly for the purpose of protecting himself against such competition.

It is interesting to note that the unions have suppressed competition as ruthlessly as have his employers. The worker's attachment to his union has become greater than his attachment to the United States ideal and to the national interest.

The idea is being systematically propagated that the American Government is one which favors the millionaire rather than the wage-earner; and the facts which either superficially or really support this view are sufficiently numerous to win for it an apparently increasing

number of adherents. The union laborer is becoming suspicious not only of his employer, but of the constitution of American society.

The union leaders pay homage to the great American principle of equal rights, but they really demand its abandonment. They want economic and political order that will discriminate in favor of the union labor against the non-union labor. The unions want to be recognized for raising the general standard of living in America. What they interpret as equal rights, are really special rights for them.

Both unions and large corporations demand government protection and recognition, but resent the notion of efficient governmental regulation. The both became strong as a result of weak state governments and they certainly do not want federal intervention and interference.

It is obvious that the development in this country of two such powerful and unscrupulous and well organized special interests has created a condition which the founders of the Republic never anticipated.

The role of Lawyers has changed greatly since the Civil War. American Lawyers founded the Republic and have always governed it. A few general and even one colonel have been elected president, and occasionally a business man, but for the most part, our politicians are lawyers. They have a professional monopoly going.

American government is a government by law. Based upon the creation of the Supreme Court as the interpreter of Fundamental Law, the American lawyer is responsible for the future of the country.

The Supreme Court Justice is truly the High Priest of our political faith.

The statesman who is not a lawyer suffers under many disadvantages. We are in a government by lawyers.

In its original form, and in its present form, the Constitution was an ambiguous document which might have been interpreted along several different lines; and the Supreme Court in its official exposition have been influenced by other than strictly legal and verbal reasons.

In the past, our greatest statesmen were practicing lawyers. They had experience of men and affairs and were quite successful at their practice. Now, they are more likely to be less successful lawyers.

This government by law, is not only a government by lawyers, but is a government in the interest of litigation. The lawyer, just as the millionaire and the politician, has reaped a bountiful harvest from the inefficiency and irresponsibility of American state governments and from the worship of individual rights.

Reformers

The political leaders with the largest personal followings are some kind of reformers. They sit in presidential chairs; they occupy executive mansions; they extort legislation from unwilling politicians; they regulate and abuse the erring corporations; they are coming to control the press; and they are the most aggressive force in American public opinion. They are convinced that they are destined to make a much more salient and significant contribution to the history of the United States than has been made by any group since the Civil War. There is tariff reform; Civil service reform; Municipal reform; Social Reform. The function of reform is to deprive the parasites of their peculiar opportunities. Reform Must Restore to the people the Opportunities and Power of which they have been deprived. Reform is a fight between wicked and good, the law and the violators at least according to the reformers. The problem is that reform has rarely if ever been non-partisan.

The abuses, about which reformers complain, are not weeds that popped up and can be removed by a man and a hoe, but cultivated plants that have been cultivated and encouraged to grow.

All the leading reformers begin by piously reiterating certain phrases about equal rights for all and special privileges for none and of government of the people, by the people and for the people. They then proceed to interpret the phrases according to their personal, class, local and partisan preconceptions and interests.

Teddy Roosevelt's Square Deal came as a result of his believing the American people were not getting one. Someone was stacking the deck against them and he was going to go after those doing that.

A power which is theoretically absolute under no obligation to respect the rights either of individuals or minorities; and sooner or later such power will be used for the purpose of opposing the individual.

There can be no democracy where the people do not rule; but government by the people is not necessarily democratic. The popular will must in a democratic state be expressed somehow in the interest of democracy itself; and we have not traveled very far towards a satisfactory conception of democracy until this democratic purpose has received some definition.

All men are created equal means equal rights for everyone. If any citizen or group of citizens enjoy an advantage over their fellow citizens, then the most sacred principle of democracy is violated. THIS IS BULLSHIT!!! It's bullshit because men were created equal means everyone has the right to Life, Liberty, Property and the Pursuit of Happiness. Period. That's it and that's all there is. The problem lies in the interpretation and there are plenty who want to interpret it to best suit their needs.

Men naturally disposed to be envious and suspicious of others more fortunate than themselves come to confuse their suspicions with a duty to the society. What is good for one generation may not be good for the next. What is good for one man may not be good for another. What is good for the community as a whole may not be good for the minority that resides within the community.

IN CLAIMING WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO BE THEIR RIGHTS... Here in lies the problem. People act on their own behalf based upon democratic principle.

Hamilton and the constitutional liberals asserted that the state should interfere exclusively on behalf of individual liberty.

A democracy, like every political and social group, is composed of individuals, and must be organized for the benefit of its constituent members. But the individual has no chance of effective personal power except by means of the secure exercise of certain personal rights. Such rights, then, must be secured and exercised; yet when they are exercised, their tendency is to divide the community into divergent classes. Even if enjoyed with some equality in the beginning, they do not continue to be equally enjoyed, but make towards discriminations advantageous to a minority.

A democracy must recognize political, economic and social discriminations, but it must also manage to withdraw its consent whenever these discriminations show any tendency to excessive endurance. The state must represent the whole community which includes the individual as well as the mass, the many as well as the few, the few as well as the one.

A democracy should encourage the political leadership of experienced, educated and well trained men, but only on the express condition that their power is delegated and is to be used, under severe penalties, for the benefit of the people as a whole.

The whole people will always consist of individuals, constituting small classes, who demand special opportunities, and the mass of the population who demand for their improvement more generalized opportunities. At any given time there will be conflict.

Is democracy socialistic if it is inseparable from a candid, patient and courageous attempt to advance the social problem towards a satisfactory solution. (Yeah, but who determines what is the SOCIAL PROBLEM and how to fix it? Animal Farm!) A democracy dedicated to individual and social betterment is necessarily individualist as well as socialist. A democracy devoted to the welfare of the whole people by means of a conscious labor of individual and social improvement; and that is precisely the sort of democracy which demands for its realization the aid of the Hamilton nationalistic organization and principle.

The American people possessed a collective character even before they possessed a national organization; and both before and after the foundation of a national government, these common traditions were by no means wholly democratic.

To a great many Americans, the process of increasing nationalization has a tendency to mean merely an increase in the functions of the central government. A constructive relationship between the national and democratic principles is interpreted as an attempt to limit state government and disparage state rights.

THE STATE GOVERNMENTS ARE NOT COMPETENT TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST AND SPIRIT WITH THE GRAVE PROBLEMS CREATED BY THE AGGRANDIZEMENT OF CORPORATE AND INDIVIDUAL WEALTH AND THE INCREASING CLASSIFICATION OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

It is wrongly believed that any increase in the authority of the Federal Government is dangerous to the American people. How can this be when the Federal Government belongs to the American People even more completely than do the State governments.

The people are sovereign, but who and what are the people? And how can a multi-headed sovereignty be made to work? Is it by any chance majority which happens to gain control of the government and that the decisions and actions of the majority are inevitably and unexceptionally democratic?

The people are not sovereign as individuals. They are not sovereign in reason and morals even when united into a majority. They become sovereign only in so far as they succeed in reaching and expressing a collective purpose. They are sovereign in so far as they are united in spirit and in purpose; and they are united in so far as they are loyal to one another, to their joint past and to the Promise of the future.

The ultimate power to command must rest with that authority which, if necessary, can force people to obey; and any plan of association which seeks to ignore the part which physical force plays in life is necessarily incomplete.

The US must always have a decisive effect upon the nature of its policy in foreign affairs; and undoubtedly no course of action in respect to other nations can be national without serving the interests of democracy. As America becomes more of a nation, it must assume a more definite and responsible place in the international system. (Based upon this book, we are no longer looking inward, but outward toward a global world. That's the pitch. We've moved on to take our spot in the world and world affairs and that is the reason why we need to move away from state power and increase federal power. According to Croly, by being a global player, everyone within the US will rise with it. The global player is the high tide for all ships. YIKES!!)

The Monroe Doctrine has been accepted to be the equivalent to the Declaration of Independence in the field of foreign affairs. The Monroe Doctrine, as proclaimed in 1823, declared that the neutrality of the American democracy, so far as Europe was concerned, must be balanced by the non-intervention of European legitimacy and aristocracy in the affairs of the American continents. Now this extension of American

foreign policy was, as we have seen, justified, in so far as it was a protest against any possible interference on the part of the Holy Alliance in American politics. Hamilton, while he was right in seeking to prevent the American people from allying themselves with the aggressive French democracy, he was wrong in failing to foresee that the national interest of the United States was identified with the general security and prosperity of liberal political institutions – that the United States must by every practical means encourage the spread of democratic methods and ideas. As much in foreign as in domestic affairs must the American people seek to unite national efficiency with democratic idealism. The Monroe Doctrine has no status in the accepted system of International Law and its international standing is due to its express proclamation as an essential part of the foreign policy of the US. The Monroe Doctrine in its most popular form proclaims a rigid policy of continental isolation - America for America and Europe for Europeans.

Define & Explain the Monroe Doctrine

By [Ploni Almoni](#), eHow Contributor
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The Monroe Doctrine was originally concerned with Latin America.

The Monroe Doctrine was an official statement of U.S. foreign policy, adopted Dec. 2, 1823 under the administration of President James Monroe. The original intent of the Monroe Doctrine was to prevent European colonial activities in the Americas, particularly Latin America. Although widely disregarded when it was originally promulgated, the Monroe Doctrine has been invoked and expanded by several administrations over the last two centuries.

. Origins

- . The original thrust of the Monroe Doctrine was to discourage Europeans from attempting to assert control over Spanish colonies. The British supported the United States doctrine, which ultimately promoted their domination of [shipping](#) in the Atlantic Ocean. Although Latin America was the principal object of the Monroe Doctrine, the immediate cause for the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine was a Russian attempt to limit access to the northwestern region of North America.

. History

- . Latin American leaders, particularly Simon Bolivar of Colombia,

originally viewed the Monroe Doctrine favorably, since it promoted their independence from the Spanish homeland. The United States acted to enforce the Monroe Doctrine on several occasions in the 19th century, notably to prevent Spanish domination of Cuba (1898), French incursions in Mexico (1865) and British involvement in Texas (1836).

. The Roosevelt Corollary

- . In 1904-05, President Theodore Roosevelt advocated an expansion of the Monroe Doctrine, which has become known as the Roosevelt Corollary. In keeping with Roosevelt's policy of "walking softly and carrying a big stick," he argued that the United States had the responsibility of acting as an "international policeman" to ensure that European creditor nations would not gain excessive power in Latin American debtor nations.

. During the Cold War

- . Soviet involvement in Cuba, including the construction of missile bases on this island just 90 miles off the coast of Florida, caused President John F. Kennedy to invoke the Monroe Doctrine and establish a blockade of the island in 1962. After several days of a tense standoff, First Secretary of the Communist Party Nikita Khrushchev "blinked first," and the missile bases were dismantled.

. Criticism

- . Originally conceived as a measure to ensure the independence of Latin American nations, the Monroe Doctrine has ironically become an excuse for United States intervention and sometimes dominance, particularly under the Roosevelt Corollary. Some of the impact of the Roosevelt Corollary was blunted by Franklin D. Roosevelt's adoption of the "Good Neighbor Policy" in 1934. United States influence on domestic politics still rankles Latin American countries.

Read more: [Define & Explain the Monroe Doctrine | eHow.com](http://www.ehow.com/about_6537282_define-explain-monroe-doctrine.html#ixzz0xjCqehh3)
http://www.ehow.com/about_6537282_define-explain-monroe-doctrine.html#ixzz0xjCqehh3

The one way in which the foreign policy of the United States can make for democracy is by strengthening and encouraging those political forces which make for international peace.

NOTE: He says isolationism and Laissez Faire is the best route to take. BUT, you better be prepared to expect the unexpected. It is as though he was writing all of this FOR Teddy Roosevelt. Dear Mr. President, if the unexpected takes place, you better have one helluva military at hand to deal with it.

A country's standing as a nation is determined precisely by its ability to conquer and to hold a dignified and important place in the society of nations.

The Federal Constitution is not all it should be, but it is better than any substitute upon which American public opinion could now agree. Modifications may and should somehow be made in details, but for the present not in fundamentals.

The Federal Government has done much to ameliorate the condition of the American people, whereas the state governments have done little or nothing. Instead of representing, as a government should, the better contemporary ideals and methods, they have reflected at best the average standard of popular behavior and at worst a standard decidedly below average. The lawlessness which so many Americans bemoan in American life must be traced to the inefficiency of the state governments. If the central government had shared this weakness, the American political organism would have already dissolved in violence and bloodshed.

NOTE: Croly never foresees the corruption that can grow within and permeate the Federal Government. He acts as though it is a purified sanctity, whereas the states are all corrupt and immoral. I wish the S.O.B. were alive today to see what his dream looks like NOW!!

In spite of a good deal of corruption and subserviency to special interests, the judges are usually honest men and good average lawyers; but to the fact that they are elected for a comparatively short term has made them

the creatures of the political machine, and has demoralized their political standards. They use court patronage largely for the benefit of the machine. NOTE: I wonder what he would have said about FDR's administration.

The educational system of the country is not only chaotic, but it is very imperfectly adapted to the needs of an industrial and agricultural democracy. American state governments have been corrupt and inefficient largely because they have been organized for the benefit of corrupt and inefficient men; and as long as they continue to be organized on such a basis, no permanent or substantial improvement can be expected. Moreover, any reorganization in order to be effective must not deal merely with details and expedients. It must be as radical as are the existing disorganization and abuses. It must be founded on a different relation between the executive and legislative branches and a wholly different conception of the function of a state legislative body.

Representation should not be thrown away unless the change can be justified by a specific, comprehensive and conclusive analysis of the causes of the failure of the state governments.

American legislatures have been betrayed by the interests of their constituents, and have been systematically passing laws for the benefit of corrupt and special interests. The people must consequently take back the trust, which has been delegated to representative bodies. They must resume at least the power to initiate the legislation they want; and no law dealing with a really important subject should be passed without their direct consent. (NOTE: He is talking about the states here, never coming to the realization that the Federal Government could be equally corrupt if not more so! For a visionary, Croly lacked vision! Another prime example of Belief Follows Need.)

When a large number of individuals to whom authority is delegated exercise that authority improperly, one may safely infer that the system is at fault as much as the individual. NOTE: I thoroughly AGREE with this statement.)

No plan of political organization can in the nature of things offer an absolute guarantee that a government will not misuse its powers; but a government of the kind suggested, should it prove to be either corrupt or incompetent, could remain in control only by the express acquiescence of the electorate. MEN OF integrity, force and ability would be tempted to run

for office by the stimulating opportunity offered for effective achievement.
(NOTE: WHAT!?!?!?)

IF the voters persist in electing incompetent or corrupt executives, they would deserve the sort of government they get and in the end will be deprived of their vote.

The simplest way to dispense with the professional politician is to dispense with the services he performs.

A democracy has no interest in making good government complicated, difficult and costly. It has, on the contrary, every interest in so simplifying its machinery that only decisive decisions and choices are submitted to the voter. **The Reformers must put strong wine into their bottle. They must make office-holding worth while by giving to the officeholders the power of effecting substantial public benefits.**

Or, an inquiry might be made as to whether the educational system of the country, which should remain under exclusive state jurisdiction, is well adapted to the extremely complicated purpose of endowing its various pupils with the general and special training most helpful to the creation of genuine individuals, useful public servants and loyal and contented citizens of their own states.

If the state governments are to reach their maximum usefulness in the American political system, they must not only be self-denying in respect to the central government, but generous in respect to their creatures – the municipal corporations. There are certain business and social questions of exclusivity or chiefly local importance which should be left to the municipal governments.

A state is a political and legal body; and as a political and legal body it cannot escape its appropriate political and social responsibilities. A municipality is a living center of economic activity – a genuine case of essentially local economic interests.

The one thing the states are incompetent to deal with is the regulation of commerce. The control of corporations, the distribution of wealth and the prevention of poverty should be left exclusively to the central government.

In the case of railroads, with each state regulating the rails within their own state, a railroad operating inter-state has to deal with different regulations each time it crosses another state's border. This is highly inefficient, complicated and complex.

The central government in its policy toward large corporations must adopt one of two courses. Either it must discriminate in their favor or it must discriminate against them. The third choice of being impartial has no real existence. Any recognition of the large corporations, any successful attempt to give them a legal standing as authentic as their economic efficiency, amounts substantially to a discrimination in their favor. The recognition of the large corporation is equivalent to the perpetuation of its existing advantages. If the small competitor is to be allowed a chance of regaining its former economic importance, he must receive the active assistance of the government. Its policy must become, not one of recognition, but one of recognition under conditions which would impair the efficiency of the large industrial organizations.

The need for regulation should not be made the excuse for bestowing upon officials a responsibility which they cannot in the long run properly redeem. If the commission is granted the power to promulgate rates, to control the service granted to the public, or to order the purchase of new equipment, it has become more than a regulative official body. It has become responsible for the business management of the corporation committed to its charge; and again it must be asserted that mixed control of this kind is bound to take the energy and initiative out of such business organizations.

Like all aggressive men alive to their own interest, the laborer soon decided that what he really needed was not equal rights, but special opportunities. The Labor Unions, like the big corporations, need legal recognition; and this legal recognition means in their case, also, substantial discrimination by the state in their favor. According to their manifestoes they demand nothing but Fair Play; but the demand for fair play is as usual merely the hypocritical exterior of a demand for substantial favoritism.

The labor unions deserve to be favored, because they are the most effective machinery which has as yet been forged for the economic and social amelioration of the laboring class. They have helped to raise the standard of living, to mitigate the rigors of competition among individual laborers, and in this way to secure for labor a larger share of the total industrial product. As a type, the non-union laborer is a species of industrial derelict. He is the laborer who has gone astray and who either from apathy, unintelligence, incompetence or some immediately pressing need prefers his own individual interest to the joint interests of himself and his fellow-laborers. From the point of view of a constructive national policy he does not deserve any special protection. In fact, I am willing to go farther and assert that the non-union laborer should, in the interest of a genuinely democratic organization of labor, be rejected; and should be rejected as emphatically, if not as ruthlessly, as the gardener rejects the weeds in his garden for the benefit of fruit and flower-bearing plants. (NOTE: YIKES!!!!)

The labor unions are perfectly right in believing that all who are not in favor of them are against them, and that a state which was really “impartial” would be adopting a hypocritical method of retarding the laborer from improving his condition.

NOTE: HERE WE GO: The employers are usually fighting not for the purpose of developing good labor, but for the purpose of taking advantage of poor, weak and dependent laborers.

Consider for a moment what individuality and individual independence really mean. A genuine individual must at least possess some special quality which distinguishes him from other people, which unifies the successive phases and the various aspects of his own life and which results in personal moral freedom. In what way and to what extent does the existing economic system contribute to the creation of such genuine individuals? At its best it asks of every man who engages in a business occupation that he make as much money as he can, and the only condition it imposes on this pursuit of money are those contained in the law of the land and a certain conventional moral code. The pursuit of money is to arouse a man to individual activity, and law and custom determined the conditions to which the activity must conform. The man does not become an individual merely by obeying the written and unwritten laws. He becomes an individual because the desire to make money releases his energy and intensifies his personal initiative. The kind of individuals created by such an economic system are not distinguished one from another by any special purpose. They are distinguished by the energy and success whereby the common purpose of making money is accompanied and followed.

(NOTE: Croly truly believes everyone is money driven, which means he himself must have been money driven to come to this conclusion. Considering Albert Einstein introduced his Special Theory of Relativity in 1905, I would think that that would be one helluvan example of someone who defies Croly’s theory.)

In so far as the economic motive prevails, individuality is not developed; it is stifled. The man whose motive is that of money-making will not make the work any more excellent than is demanded by the largest possible returns; and frequently the largest possible returns are to be obtained by indifferent work, or by work which has absolutely no social value. (NOTE: YIKES!!!)

The claim is that the money-making motive is the only one which will really arouse the great majority of men and to weaken it would be to rob the whole economic system momentum. (NOTE: Obviously, Croly never heard about Passion.)

What a democratic nation must do is not to accept human nature as it is, but to move in the direction of its improvement. (NOTE: I love the way that because he said it is human nature for man to be driven by money, it must be true.) The question it must answer is: How can it contribute to the increase of American individuality? The defender of the existing system must be able to show either 1. That it does contribute to the increase of American individuality; or that 2. Whatever its limitations, the substitution of some better system is possible. (NOTE: Without question, Croly is an excellent

writer and thinker. I commend him on how he attempts to manipulate the thinking of the reader like a skillful surgeon. Apparently he successfully applied his skills and craft upon Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and FDR.)

... democracy contemplates that every man shall think first of the state and next of himself. (NOTE: Sounds a lot like, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Yet, if you ask biologists like Sapolsky and others about the human species, they will tell you flat out that Marlin Perkins was full of crap. Animals do not do things for the good of the group, they do what is best for them. And the primary, (no pun intended) goal of every species is strictly to reproduce itself. I love the question, Is a chicken an Egg's way of reassuring that it will reproduce itself?)

If it be true that democracy is based upon the assumption that every man shall serve his fellow men, the organization of democracy should gradually be adapted to that assumption. They can be made permanently unselfish only by being helped to become disinterested in their individual purposes and how can they be disinterested except in a few little spots as long as their daily occupation consist of money seeking and spending in conformity with a few written and unwritten rules? In the complete democracy, a man must in some way be made to serve the nation in the very act of contributing to his own individual fulfillment. (NOTE: The World According to Croly. I think it is, therefore it MUST be true!)