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“What It Means to Be an American,” 1903 October 18.

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Oct. 18th, 1903.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN AMERICAN.

Who is an American? Not he who is an American by birth, but he who is American in spirit and in purpose. True Americanism is not in the blood, but in heart and soul. I know recent immigrants, not speaking nor fully understanding the language of the land, who are better Americans than some whose fathers for generations have been born upon the soil of freedom, but who, themselves, in word and thought and deed, and especially in ideal, are un-American.

The assimilation of races and nationalities and religions on this western continent has been the wonder of the world. Millions have become American, heart and soul. We want no hyphenated Americans, - German-American, Irish-American, Hungarian-American, Russian-American, and all of the rest. Let us be Americans.

The greatness and glory of America are not alone in the expanse of territory, in the riches of our resources. Let us not deify industry and commerce. America must not be measured by agriculture and manufacture alone, triumphant in exports and imports. President Roosevelt said - "The merely material, the merely commercial ideal, the ideal of the men whose fatherland is the till" is, in its very essence, debasing and lowering. We should remember the thought of George William Curtis, - "commercial prosperity is only a curse if it be not subservient to moral and intellectual progress, and our prosperity will conquer us if we do not conquer our prosperity." We have something to do in America besides turning the air and water and earth into wealth."

To be an American should mean more than to enjoy the blessings of freedom more than to share in our riches and prosperity, more than to strive unhindered for all we can make and get. To be an American means to be loyal to the American idea, to the idea of liberty. We should take to heart the impressive and inspiring words of President Roosevelt and our only living ex-president, Grover Cleveland. Said Cleveland, within the week, "Give to our people something that will concentrate their common affection and solicitous care, and let that be their country's good; give them a purpose that stimulates them to unite in

Lefty endeavor - and let that purpose be a demonstration of the sufficiency and beneficence of our popular rule, and we shall find that in their political thought there will be no place for the suggestions of sordidness and pelf."

What does it mean to be an American? And what is the purpose of these United States? The purpose of the republic is not mere protest against and denial of the divine right of kings. To be an American means not alone the lessening of burdens and taxes and oppressions which have been the curse of mankind through the ages. Not negation, protest and denial, but affirmation of a positive faith and a positive life. The American will continue to make unceasing protest against tyranny and oppression and injustice. He will declare that divine right is not in princes but in the people. He will proclaim that the appointment of God is not upon kings but upon the nations. The true American will affirm and reaffirm the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence and of the constitution. He will renew in the children of every generation the spirit of the fathers of the republic. The opening chapter of Genesis conceives man made in the image of God and our American institutions are based upon the principle, God-given are the rights of man to liberty and justice. Americans thought to secure and establish and preserve human liberty and true Americans will continue to proclaim liberty and to fight for liberty if necessary until the day shall come when liberty shall be to all, everywhere. America is example, proof and testimony to military monarchies and to despotism, that to all, of all conditions and races and nationalities, may be and should be given, fullest individual freedom. Therefore the people of America have content and happiness.

To be an American means to be the preacher of hope to the persecuted and the enslaved - to be the prophet of the better age to mankind. He is the prophet of peace, giving testimony in his own history of the blessings of almost unbroken peace for more than a century. The people of America are happy, their life unclouded by the fear of war. To be an American is to be the prophet of justice and liberty, justice is embodied in the very institutions of freedom. Curtis is right. The object of human government is human liberty.