

FOREWORD

THE NOTION AND REALITY OF AMERICAN DECLINE is much on the minds of the conscientious public in this post-9/11 era. But it has also impinged on the wider public, too.

According to a *Wall Street Journal/NBC News* poll, asking “Do you feel America is in a state of decline?,” fully 60% to 74% of respondents said Yes, with 74% saying so in 2008, the year of the financial crash, and 60% in 2014. Equally worrying, those “not confident” their children will fare better than they fared are rapidly rising in number, from 56% in ’08 to 76% in ’14.

For those of us who grew up in the bright and prosperous post-World War II years, decline still seems unfathomable. Can we restore that bright, prosperous America?

It was only with time that I realized this question of American decline was directly or indirectly driving much of my commentary for *The Huffington Post*, for whom I began writing in 2009. I am grateful to *The Huffington Post* for granting my request to pursue my ideal beat: examining the intersection where politics, culture, ethical-moral issues, and the American character meet.

This volume collects my *Huffington Post* commentary from 2009 through 2014. While each commentary addresses an aspect of America in these problematic years since 9/11, the end-essay confronts the question posed in this book’s title, “Can America save itself from decline?” The several columns written for other outlets are so indicated.

In addition to *The Huffington Post*, I also acknowledge my former home, *The Christian Science Monitor*, for its useful guidance for the commentary it publishes: that it abide by a bias of hope and, no matter

how bleak the examination, that it leave the reader with a constructive thought or, better, an action step. I contributed commentary to the *Monitor* beginning shortly after 9/11, September 11, 2001, and continuing into 2009.

It is with real pleasure that I single out Dr. Joseph Bell for special thanks. Of all the thinking Americans with whom I have chewed over the questions in this volume, Joe is the stand-out. With his expertise in politics and economics, Joe has expanded my thinking about America: that it is as much a capitalist economy as it is a democracy, that in the “great game” of Capitalism-and-Democracy, democracy must “muscle up” if it is to hold its own against the power of the dollar. In innumerable kitchen-table talks and marathon phone calls, with Joe giving capitalism the edge and me plugging for democracy, we have persuaded each other on various points and arrived at a working theory, by no means unified, of America at this hinge moment in its history. It’s been intense and fun, fun, fun. And in his inimitable way, Joe can take credit for pressing me to the conclusion: “Finish the bleeping book, Seaquist!”

I would also like to acknowledge my mother, Mildred (Millie) Lofberg. While we take opposite political tacks—she is Republican, I am Democrat—I can’t help but see in her, a member of “the Greatest Generation,” the independent and resourceful spirit that made America great, through whose eyes I view much about America today. My late father, Dr. Carl Lofberg, shared that same spirit, albeit more quietly, and was my early interlocutor on *Life*, etc.

And as always, I thank my excellent husband Larry. A super-active member of the conscientious public, Larry served in the Washington state legislature 2006–2014 and chaired the House committee on higher education 2010–2014. As with Joe, I have chewed over with Larry all the contents of this book. Larry is my first reader and my best friend.

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