

In the Land of Milk and Honey

A Short History of America and the People it Created

Sven Steinmo

Americans live in the richest and most powerful country in the history of mankind. This country's reach, power and influence is staggering: American movies, American products and American culture are everywhere. Our economic dominance is undeniable. Today, for example, the GNP of the United States is *greater* than the total GNP of: China, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Australia, Canada, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Austria and Switzerland, *combined*. Indeed, the 267 million people who live in the United States produce more than all the 4.3 billion people who live in the 150 poorest countries in the world. McDonald's opens a new restaurant somewhere in the world every fourteen and a half hours. More non-Americans watch *Bay Watch* each week than have watched any other television show in the history of the world.

Most Americans take America's power, position and wealth for granted. We enjoy it, we certainly appreciate it. But how often do we ask ourselves: *Why* did it happen? What is it about the United States or Americans that has made this country so rich and powerful? Why is it that this particular place came to be the most watched, admired, feared and envied country in the world? Why is America so different?

This book offers an answer to this question. It tells the American story and explains why this country is so different. There is nothing obvious about the American story... It did not have to turn out this way. God did not create this country, people did. Fate did not dictate their history, they made it. This is not always a pretty story, even while it is often inspiring. It is a story of expansion and exploitation, just as it is a story of growth and dynamism. It is a story that begins with small repressive, intolerant European communities on the edge of what they thought was a hostile and foreboding frontier. It is a story of the conquering of that frontier and the creation of new ones. It is a story of the evolution of a people and the creation of an exceptionally dynamic and individualistic culture. It is a story of a very peculiar political system that is strong enough to

dominate the globe, yet so fragmented that it can scarcely govern itself. It is a story that changed the world.

In the Land of Milk and Honey shows how and why Americans developed into the people they are today. It is simply not true that America was originally a country of creative individualists. Early Americans were more often highly egalitarian, religious zealots, living in tightly controlled homogeneous communities who disdained commercialism and "licentiousness." Americans *became* the independent, creative and materialistic people that they are today. This book tells how and why this happened. Similarly, as any seventh grader could tell you, America did not start out as a country that stretched from sea to shining sea. At the time of the Revolution, the colonies extended only as far west as the Appalachian mountains. This book explains how and why these small and very different colonies came together to form a political union that could so quickly *become* a continental political economy. Finally, this book will argue that America's fractured political system has enabled and encouraged these people. It explains why we have a strong nation and a weak state and what difference that makes. *Milk and Honey* argues that the culture of the American people is a product of both the system they have developed and the land that they now dominate.

This book tells the story of how Americans created America and how America created Americans.

Book Outline

- America 2000. "What a Country"

This chapter offers an overview of American Culture, American Capitalism and American Democracy. It demonstrates the extent to which American culture, resources, and institutions are different from any others in the world. The chapter will provide a number of graphs and figures showing 1) that America is not just richer than other countries, it is *a great deal richer*. 2) American political institutions are more than different from those of other modern democracies, they are systematically and significantly different. Finally, 3) American beliefs and attitudes are both different from those of other countries, but they fit into a somewhat coherent whole. Drawing from cross cultural literature we will sketch a cultural portrait of modern America emphasizing its beliefs in opportunity, the basic equality of man, and their indomitable ambition and drive.

1. The Origins of the United States of America

How British/European Ideas became American Institutions.

2. The Evolution of the Independent American

Homesteads, Migration and Ethnic Cleansing.

3. **Why Marx *and* Turner were Wrong**

Capitalism and Democracy in 20th Century America

4. **Building the American Dream**

Public Education and the Social Welfare State.

5. **Inventing new Frontiers.**

America at the Crossroads

6. **Globalization and Inequality: Whither the American Dream?**

More detailed chapter outlines available upon request.

Why This Book?

I believe there a solid market for this book. *In the Land of Milk and Honey*, fits into a genre of very successful historical analyses designed to reach a wide public audience. It is written in a voice similar to several recent books which have done quite well in the trade market: These books include: David Landes', *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, and Paul Kennedy's, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, Jared Diamond's *Gun's Germs and Steel*, and Kevin Phillip's *The Cousins Wars*. Like these books, *Milk and Honey*, speaks of general themes and tells a sweeping history. Like several of these books, it builds on the author's academic credentials but avoids academic jargon. The book will be credible as a scholarly source, but will not be laden with overused footnotes.

There are currently two types of books on the market that specifically examine American culture, "American Exceptionalism" and/or the American Dream. The first type are academic. Examples include: *American Exceptionalism: The Double Edged Sword*, by Seymour Martin Lipset, *Only in America?* by Graham Wilson, and *America the Unusual*, by John Kingdon. While these books have each been quite successful in their academic markets, they do not reach out to a more general audience.

There are a few books that are specifically written for the trade audience. Generally, these herald the wonders of America, its culture or its' century. Two have hit the top of the NYT best seller list: *The Greatest Generation*, by Tom Brokaw and Harold Evans.' *The American Century*. Clearly, these two authors in particular have both excellent name recognition and personal connection helping to maximize their popular exposure. But, they have also been

successful because speak to an issue that millions of Americans are genuinely curious about: What is it about America that makes it so special? It should not be surprising that so many are curious about this given that we are at the end of the "American Century" and, despite earlier predictions about the rise of Asia, there are no serious contenders for world leadership anywhere on the horizon of the 21st century. Even if America were not the only major country that has not yet stumbled into the current world economic crisis, many of us would still be more than a little interested in why this country has been so successful.

Milk and Honey offers a systematic historical examination of how and *why* Americans became the unique people that we so clearly are. Readers will find familiar themes developed earlier by Frederick Jackson Turner and David Potter. *Milk and Honey* moves beyond these classics and shows how we as a nation have constructed these frontiers and created this opulence. It takes three simple themes, the Land, the People, and the Institutions and shows how they *shaped one another* throughout American history. In short, this book takes on an admittedly big question and offers quite straightforward answers.

Finally, *Milk and Honey*, speaks directly to current issues in American politics. It should appeal to an audience similar to that of Robert Reich, E. J. Dionne and Lester Thurow. This book shows that the American Dream is has been made possible through the conscious intervention of the American state: Who we are as a people is in many respects a product of public policy. The independent individualism of American culture has been supported and made possible because of the remarkable egalitarianism of our society. Now, globalization threatens our commitment to an egalitarian society. This book argues that to succumb to these short term competitive pressures threatens the foundations of American culture. It threatens the very thing that has made this country rich and prosperous in the first place.

Endorsements for *In the Land of Milk and Honey* available from:

Columnist, Molly Ivins

Professor, Seymour Martin Lipset

Professor, Patricia Limmerick

Governor, Richard Lamm

About the Author:

Sven Steinmo teaches political economy at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He has published several books and articles on American political development, comparative public policy, and cross-cultural training. He has received many awards for his teaching and writing since finishing his Ph.D. at U.C. Berkeley in 1987. The American Political Science Association recognized his book, *Taxation and Democracy* (Yale Univ. Press) as the "Best Book Published in Political Economy in 1992,1993 or 1994." He also won the APSA's

"Gabriel Almond Award for the Best Ph.D. Dissertation in Comparative Politics" in 1989. Since moving to Colorado in 1987, Professor Steinmo has also been honored with seven teaching awards by his university.

Professor Steinmo has published several essays on "American Exceptionalism" which are widely read and cited by political scientists. Two of these essays: *"It's the Institutions, Stupid! Why America Cannot Pass National Health Care Reform"* and *"American Exceptionalism Reconsidered: Culture or Institutions?"* are currently required readings in a number of top graduate political science programs across the country including Harvard, Yale and Princeton.

Steinmo has owned a number of small businesses over the past 25 years and has worked as a farm laborer, carpenter and oil field worker in a number of different countries. In the past several years he has been active in cross-cultural training consulting. Clients include AT&T, General Motors, Motorola, Whirlpool, and a number of others.

Professor Steinmo is married and has two children. He spends as much time as possible in the cabin he built with his own hands in the Colorado Rockies.

A more detailed resume' can be found at: <http://stripe.colorado.edu/~steinmo/>