

CRIBB<S>NOTE – MAY 16, 2010

What does it mean to be the “United States of America?” The name of our country has significance, but it is often either taken for granted or not given serious consideration. Our history informs our understanding of the importance and distinction of our moniker.

We are not the only “United States” in the world. Both the “United States of Mexico” and the “United Arab Emirates” share similar names to identify themselves.

The “United States of America” is forged out of the dissimilarities of its citizens and residents. We are intentionally conceived as a nation born from diversity, difference, and dispersion. Our population derives from indigenous and international peoples.

E Pluribus Unum, “Out of many, one,” was the first motto of our country. In 1776, that motto was placed on the Seal of the United States of America. It also appears on our one dollar bills and U.S. coins.

We are a nation of people who arrived on this continent from every region of the world. Even many of the so-called Indians or Native Americans have roots in Asia. So, all of us are tied to distant places, and we are determined to exist as a civil society that opens its doors and gates to global citizens.

Inscribed on our most celebrated monument, the Statue of Liberty, are these words: *"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free; the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

We in the United States of America proclaim hospitality will be extended to the most desperate and least desired persons who dare to dream and venture. The very heart and soul of our country are drenched in the belief and promise that all people will receive a welcome that invites ingenuity, intellect, industrious ambition and goodwill.

To be “united” means we have come together and we are not deterred by our differences. We acknowledge the realities of our various backgrounds and circumstances. That is what makes the United States of America unique and great. We do not shy away from others because they do not share a common heritage. Instead, we embrace immigrants and strangers. We become united for the very reason that we are not the same. It is that fact, our differences, that makes our unity possible. Failure to understand and appreciate our differences defies our identity as the United States of America.

It is un-American to reject people who traveled across borders as they struggled against the tides of political, social, racial, and economic injustices in order to establish their place in our country. Militarized zones along fortified borders with fences, high walls, and barbed wire separate more than governments. They divide and tear asunder families and cultures. Policies that make it difficult and sometimes impossible for access to ancestral homelands and traditional routes of passage violate who we are as the people of the United States of America.

Our history is replete with innumerable stories about individuals who made their way across boundaries of land and sea to become productive Americans. That gives our motto its true meaning, “Out of many, one.”

We are being tested to see if we truly are a nation that lives by its creed. In 1956 the United States of America adopted another motto, “In God we trust.” It is printed on all of our currency. When we combine our de facto motto and our official motto, we see the reflection of our country in words that convey a commitment to more than just ourselves.

Do we believe what we say? Do we honor the words and spirit of our name, motto, and publicly displayed statement inscribed in stone? The answers are found in our treatment of all people who live among us.