



**IDEA OF AMERICA  
INSTRUCTION MANUAL**



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## **ONE: INTRODUCING THE SEMINAR AND SETTING THE STAGE**

The Idea of America seminar is an adult educational and outreach program. The premise of The Idea of America is that Americans embrace values that are often in tension. These value tensions—law vs. ethics, freedom vs. equality, unity vs. diversity, common wealth vs. private wealth—are at the heart of a great debate that began with the Founders and continues today.

As the facilitator (leader) of the seminar, your task is not to lecture. Do not assume that you must be a “professor” or “expert” on values or American history or any of the case studies, i.e. economics, education, immigration. You are a “concerned citizen” similar to all of the seminar participants. Your task is to ensure that the seminar is conducted in a safe-environment where all participants feel they can talk and discuss freely without being threatened or belittled or put-down. The intent is to provide a space where participants as colleagues or neighbors or friends can meet and rationally discuss and debate issues that are important to what it means to be an American. What it means to be a citizen in a nation that is built upon values and ideals that protect and promote the “life, liberty and pursuit of happiness” of all.

The seminar is structured in three major components.

- Part One: Our Values
- Part Two: Our Legacy
- Part Three: Our Future

In Part One we will examine our values—their meaning and their tensions. Each of us have our own understanding of our values. Not everyone will agree on what is law or ethics or freedom or equality or unity or diversity or private wealth or public wealth. Each value means something different to each of us as Americans. What are the tensions not only between our values, but also within each value? And are these values relevant to the world we live in today?

In Part Two we will explore our legacy—how our values have been reshaped by events and leaders throughout our history. We will focus on “three men and one courageous woman” who have given voice to our values and have deepened our understanding of our values. Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Elizabeth Cady Stanton each were able to express in their words and their actions certain ideals and thoughts that “were in the air” at the time that they expanded our values to be more inclusive of all Americans. What is this legacy from our past? How is this legacy shaping our nation today? And what is “in the air” today that is shaping our nation? Will this become the legacy of our future?

In Part Three we will study and debate our future—what are the major challenges we face as a nation and as individuals living in our communities. We will focus on three specific challenges that we currently face:

- Case Study One Our Economy: A Legacy of Growth and Opportunity
- Case Study Two Education: The Great Equalizer
- Case Study Three We the People: A Nation of Immigrants

The “Study Guide” provides participants the suggested reading material for each session. Note: It is important that all participants read the material in advance of each session in order that the facilitator of the seminar (seminar leader) can guide the discussion and debate so that each person will be able to participate as engaged citizens. This is not an “academic seminar” nor a platform for “venting frustrations” with the current state-of-affairs, but an interactive discussion

and debate where each participant respects the views of others although they may disagree. It is important that all participants agree to discuss and dialogue and respect the opinions of others and that no individual participant dominate the discussion.

The “case studies” will provide background for each of the three challenges we will discuss and debate as listed above. Each case study will suggest certain questions that each seminar might use. But the questions are only suggested, not mandated! We want each group and their facilitator to exercise the right to pose their own questions for discussion and debate. Finally, we want to emphasize that the success of the seminar will be largely determined by the extent to which all participants do the homework/reading and come to the session willing to engage in respectful discussion and debate.

### **SEMINAR MATERIAL AVAILABLE FOR DISTRIBUTION**

The suggested material for distribution before the seminar begins or at the first session includes:

- (1) Copy of book: *The Idea of America: Our Values, Our Legacy, Our Future*  
by John Oliver Wilson (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2017)

This book is the text for the seminar. Instructions for ordering are given in the website under “Resources.”

- (2) Pass out “Study Guide.” The Study Guide can readily be printed from the website “Idea of America Network.” The website can be accessed by entering in the address bar of your computer/laptop [www.ideaofamericanetwork.org](http://www.ideaofamericanetwork.org) or by entering on Goggle Search “Idea of America Index” which immediately brings up the network connection. Note: The first page of the website will show an image of “We the People” and a listing of all of the site connections.

### **TWO: MATERIAL FOR SEMINAR SESSION**

Material has been prepared and is readily available to aid you in preparing and leading your seminar. A disk is available that has:

- (1) Power Point slides and videos that provide information for introducing the Idea of America seminar program as well as slides covering topics in each of the six seminar sessions. The disk can be used to introduce the seminar in session one as well as slides for the following sessions. The disk contains three videos described below that make the seminar more dynamic and entertaining than simply slides. Note: The slides and videos should be used to heighten participant interest for engaging in discussion and debate. They should not be used to passively present the seminar material. Our goal is active engagement in discussion and debate, not a passive TED talk/slide show.
- (2) A pdf file of the slides. This enables you to readily print any of the specific slides you may want to distribute to seminar participants in hard copy.
- (3) A Video file showing two videos:  
BONO (a video showing musician/philanthropist Bono making a statement on Idea of America at Georgetown University). Very good introduction to the entire Idea of America concept. BONO video attracts immediate attention from audience.

GAME LOFT (a video of our after-school programs teaching history/civics through role playing games and programs). This video shows what can be done in other communities to enhance the teaching and experiencing of history/civics/values real time through role playing games and programs. A very effective means of reaching the younger audience. Also, the video tells a very engaging story of young student engagement. Note: The students in the video all come from at-risk backgrounds (lower income, broken families, drugs, etc.) In the Game Loft programs we are able to reach and mentor a tough group. But clearly the game loft models are relevant to all social-economic background students.

(4) The disk can be ordered by contacting: [johnwilson3395@comcast.net](mailto:johnwilson3395@comcast.net). Note: We intend to have the disk available through our website in the near future.

### **SUGGESTIONS AND GUIDANCE FOR CONDUCTING SEMINAR SESSIONS**

The following suggestions and guidance do not require that you use the disk for projecting the slides on a screen or the videos which require sound equipment. You may not have access to the projection equipment, or it may not be appropriate in your seminar setting. But you can print desired slides (for distribution) and discussion. Or you can use the suggestions and guidance simply to give you some thoughts and material to assist you in preparing your remarks and for keeping the session on target.

To engage participants who have not read the material, you as facilitator can refer to various statements in the book (as identified in the following outline) in the seminar sessions. For instance, in discussing the tension values, refer to each of the highlighted statements in the book associated with each tension value. Also, I have written brief comments that relate to each slide for your use. I would suggest that you make a few comments on each slide, following the lead of my suggestions or writing your own, in order to set the stage for the seminar participants to engage in discussion and debate. Do not go into a long lecture on each slide for the backup to each slide is readily available in the book.

This means that all participants will be required to have a copy of the book: John Oliver Wilson, *The Idea of America: Our Values, Our Legacy, Our Future*. They can easily order the book through the instructions given earlier. Note: You can distribute a copy of these instructions to participants or order sufficient copies yourself and collect payment at opening session.

We have found that nearly all participants will soon find that the book is written in a “reader friendly style” of short sections and to the point. It is written in story form in most parts which makes it interesting reading.

### **SESSION ONE: INTRODUCTION TO SEMINAR AND VALUE TENSION MODEL**

In your opening session:

- (1) Distribute books (unless participants ordered the book themselves)
- (2) Distribute study guide and briefly discuss structure of seminar, i.e, read material in advance, come prepared to debate and discuss, respect opinions of others, get involved. This is not a passive lecture or TED talk. It is a discussion and debate on our values and what it means to be an American. It is action oriented with a focus of what can we do in our local communities.
- (3) To use videos and slides, you must have screen and computer setup with sound.

## **LAUNCH SEMINAR**

**Show Bono video:** Statement given at Georgetown University. Good introduction to Idea of America concept. Note: If projection/sound equipment not available, you can simply refer to hardcopy of any of the slides which can be printed from the pdf presentation version on the slide.

**Slide one: Idea of America Network: A Call for Action and Unity**

**Slide two: Declaration of Premise**

**Slide three: Goals of Idea of America Network**

**Slide four: Platform One: Idea of America Seminar Program**

**Slide five: Platform Two: Coming of Age in America Youth Program**

**Slide six: Platform Three: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation**

## **INTRODUCE “VALUE TENSION MODEL”**

**Slide seven: Value Tension Model**

**Law vs. Ethics**

**Freedom vs. Equality**

**Diversity vs. Unity**

**Private Wealth vs. Common Wealth**

**Slide eight: Major Value Bridges**

**Equality**

**Freedom**

**Common Good**

Note to facilitator/leader: What you want to accomplish in session one is to introduce the Idea of America concept and program. The reason for slides one through six. If you don't use slides then you can make the same points in your presentation. Inform your participants that in session one you will lecture more than in other sessions in order to set the stage. You may want to select a few slides to print, such as Slide two Declaration of Premise (important to establish early the values and ideals we embrace in the seminar), Slide three Goals of Idea of America Network and maybe slides four, five and six (the three platforms).

Once you have done this then introduce the “value tension model” by using slide seven (hard copy) and simply just introduce the values. Don't attempt to get into a discussion of their meaning for that is the subject of Session Two. Tell participants that in preparation for Session Two they should read the book (pages 1-39) which discusses the meaning of each value.

Finish this session with Slide eight (hard copy) “Major Value Bridges.” The message here is that eight values are a lot to comprehend, and so the dramatists/historical interpreters involved in the program force us to focus on the most important “value bridges” that take us from our founding to current times. Equality, Freedom, Common Good have been identified as the three most important bridges. As such, we must more carefully define what each means and their significance as bridges from our past to our present. This will be done in Session Two.

All of this sets the stage for Session Two where you will attempt to get the seminar participants to engage in discussion and debate on the eight values and the three value bridges. Tell them that you are going to focus on the questions on page 40 of the book which means the second session will be where the participants really engage in discussion and debate. You, as seminar leader, will simply try to maintain order and respect with open discussion. Let the seminar

participants dominate this session. The only slides to be used (hard copy) in this session are Slides seven and eight.

## **SESSION TWO: DISCUSS MEANING OF VALUES AND THEIR TENSIONS**

In discussing the meaning of each value, refer the participants to each page in the book where the value is discussed. Ask a participant to read the statement highlighted in bold. Move to other participants to read statements for subsequent values. After reading each bold statement, then discuss the meaning of that particular value. This engages the participants in the discussion even though they may not read the material in advance. Bold statements are on pages 18 etc. The first bold statement deals with law and is the quote from Marbury v. Madison.

Engage in a discussion and debate. Refer participants to list of questions on page 40 in the book. You as facilitator can pre-select the questions for discussion or you can create your own set of questions. Addressing the discussion and debate questions will engage your participants.

## **SESSION THREE: OUR LEGACY**

Our legacy is from four major historical figures who gave voice and expanded our founding values to be more inclusive: Thomas Jefferson, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr. Each drew upon ideals and concepts that were “in the air” at the time they spoke. The slides simply state what was “in the air” for each historical figure. The reading discusses each of the legacies.

You as facilitator can make brief comments on each legacy as a means of introducing the topics for this session. However, do not attempt to make this session a crash course on our legacy history. Do not get bogged down in defending or elaborating on each legacy. The justification for each legacy is stated in my book which is available to the reader. Quickly show each slide and say a few words about each legacy. Then move on.

Your task is simply to get the seminar participants aboard the concept of legacies drawing upon the statement by Thomas Jefferson when accused of plagiarizing the Declaration of Independence (paraphrased) that the ideals and values expressed in the Declaration did not come solely from my mind, but “were in the air.” What was in the air were enlightenment ideals. As historians have written, America is unique in being founded on ideals and values, not a common history, a common culture, a common religion, a common anything other than being a nation created by founders all of whom were immigrants from elsewhere.

In writing the book, I asked myself: What was in the air when each of the men and woman made their historic statements? All of this sets the stage for the most import goal of this session: Discuss and debate “what is in the air today” that is shaping our nation, our society, our future. Get your seminar participants to focus on the questions in page 70 of my book.

- (1) Slide one: **Thomas Jefferson and The Enlightenment**
  - Legacy One: The Goal of Equality**
  - Legacy Two: Science and Technology**
  - Legacy Three: Education for All**

Similar to earlier sessions, have a participant read the statement highlighted in bold. For example, read the statement on page 45 which is from the Declaration of Independence. While probably well known by participants, it serves to immediately engage them in the current topic for discussion, i.e., what are the most important legacies that Thomas Jefferson gave to us. Follow the same approach for all of the major figures in subsequent slides. You briefly state and say a few words about each of these legacies in order to set the stage for discussion and debate on our current legacies and what is “currently in the air.”

(2) Slide two: **Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg**

**Legacy Four: Freedom**

**Legacy Five: Democracy**

**Legacy Six: Our Union**

Engage in reading highlighted statement and then discuss the various legacies.

(3) Slide three: **Martin Luther King Jr. and Civil Rights**

**Legacy Seven: The Promised Land**

**Legacy Eight: Nonviolence**

**Legacy Nine: Social Justice**

Engage in reading highlighted statement and then discuss the various legacies.

(4) Slide four: **Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Women’s Rights**

**Legacy Ten: Human Rights for All**

**Legacy Eleven: Grassroots Organization and Networking**

Engage in reading highlighted statement and then discuss the various legacies.

Having gone through all the slides, you are now ready to engage your seminar participants in discussion and debate on the list of questions on page 70.

## **SESSION FOUR: OUR ECONOMY: A LEGACY OF GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY**

(1 Slide one:

### **OUR ECONOMY IS BORN**

# **1776**

**Thomas Jefferson: The Declaration Independence**

**Adam Smith: The Wealth of Nations**

Make the following points regarding 1776 and the birth of our economy: (1) Both *The Declaration of Independence* and *The Wealth of Nations* were stated and published in 1776. A pure happenstance! But these two documents shaped our economy as no others. (2) While we tend to focus on the statement of civil and political rights in the Declaration, its impact on the economy is that it freed us from mercantilism and opened the opportunity for a new economy built on free-enterprise. Free-enterprise by individual workers (in seeking their own desires for work and not be bound by serfdom, indentured contracts, social and class constraints etc.) and free-enterprise for economic production (ranging from agriculture to manufacturing). (3) Adam Smith laid out in no uncertain terms the model for this new economy; (4) Americans were quick to embrace both the new opportunities and freedoms from mercantilism as well as fully embracing the free-enterprise tenets of Adam Smith.

Note: The new economy is commonly termed “capitalism” which is a “red-flag” term. A “free-enterprise economy” is a more appropriate term to use.

(2) Slide two:

**THE LEGITIMATE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT  
IN OUR ECONOMY**

**Hamilton vs. Jefferson**

**A National Bank?**

**Manufacturing vs. Agriculture**

**Wall Street Investment Bankers vs. “The Common Folk”**

George Washington as our first president faced this issue in the form of Hamilton’s proposal for a national bank. Refer to book pages 80-82. Hamilton won against Jefferson. However, the difference between the two goes far deeper regarding the future direction of our economy.

Hamilton favored: (1) National Bank which would fund both public and private investments; (2) Focus on supporting and protecting manufacturing-industrial development, particularly in the northern cities; (3) Assumption of war-time debt of the Colonies (now States) by the federal government which led to Wall Street becoming the dominant financial center of the new economy. But the assumption of such debt would make tant millionaires of many on Wall Street such as speculative bankers and investors who had bought the state debt on the cheap, meaning at highly discounted prices to war veterans and state bond holders.

Jefferson favored: (1) Decentralized economy with focus on strengthening agriculture, small farmers, small shops, small craftsmen and local services; (2) Decentralized financial power with state and local banks; (3) Opposed rewarding speculators who had bought state wartime bonds at highly discounted prices; (4) Feared over concentration of economic power at the federal level and by monopolist manufactures and financiers.

Note that these same issues are current today in our economy.

(3) Slide three:

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN  
AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT**

**Intercontinental Railroads  
National Currency  
Homestead Acts  
Agriculture Technology  
Land Grant Colleges**

What Lincoln accomplished regarding our economy is remarkable given that he was fully engaged in a Civil War that threatened our very existence as a Republic. He came from Illinois where he first made his name in supporting infrastructure investment for the burgeoning Illinois and particularly Chicago economies. His primary focus was on transportation infrastructure, particularly in transcontinental railroads. And he wanted those railroads in Illinois to enhance the economy of Chicago as opposed to St. Louis which was the dominant economy in the Midwest at the time.

Once he became president he extended his infrastructure investment policy into a broad range of activities: (1) a national currency to replace state currencies; (2) expanding the homestead acts which gave land to farmers and ensured the settlement and stability of the western lands (at the expense of the native American population that was being displaced from their lands); (3) investing in agriculture colleges and technology which supported the most important economic sector at the time although manufacturing and industrialization in the north benefited even more from the wartime experience of the Civil War. All of this laid the base on which our industrialized economy exploded in the post-Civil War era. It also set the stage for the large concentration of wealth and economic power by the “Robber Barons.”

(4) Slide four:

**TEDDY ROOSEVELT  
AND  
PROGRESSIVE ECONOMIC POLICIES**

**Government Regulation  
Anti-Trust Actions  
Consumer Protection  
Environment Protection and Preservation**

Roosevelt “tamed the free-enterprise economy” so to speak. He inherited an economy that was far from “free-enterprise” for the average American worker, farmer, family owned and operated shop or anything that was small and local. It was an economy of great inequality in the distribution of wealth, concentration of economic power in the hands of a few, flagrant display of economic wealth and power, exploiting natural resources for private wealth and producing contaminated food, water and anything else that could be monetized.

Many thought that the economy was headed for “socialism” or even “communism.” Fortunately, Roosevelt proved them wrong. He reined in the economy through aggressive anti-trust legal actions, introduced federal legislation for consumer protection, particularly in the production of food, federal legislation protecting natural resources. For the first time our free-enterprise economy felt the impact of government regulation designed not to make government the dominant economic power (as would be true with a socialized economy), but to ensure that our free-enterprise economy paid the social costs associated with the economy and functioned in the interests of all the major stakeholders in our economy—consumers, workers, investors, communities.

(5) Slide five:

**FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT  
AND  
ECONOMIC RIGHTS**

**The right to a job  
The right to adequate food and clothing  
The right to a decent home  
The right to adequate medical care  
The right to a good education  
The right to social security**

FDR is best known for his “social safety net” which is long list of programs that established a major role of government in providing economic support for those most at risk in a free-enterprise economy. In particular, the unemployed (public works), the small farmers (agriculture support programs), the elderly (social security) and the list goes on. But what he is not so well known for is his remarkable statement given in his State of the Union Address in January, 1944 at the height of the war.

He was the first president, or even a significant politician, to surface the question of economic rights in our history. We were founded on civil and political rights. And those rights have received the most attention in the course of our history. But what about economic rights? Do we have a right to a safe work environment? Do we have a right to social security? Do we have a right to health care? Or are these primarily social programs that are subject to the will of the president and the Congress? This was a hot issue in FDR’s time. And it is a hot issue today.

Discuss and debate!

**(6) Slide six:**

**RONALD REAGAN  
AND  
ECONOMIC FREEDOM**

**The freedom to work  
The freedom to fruits of one's labor  
The freedom to own and control one's property  
The freedom to participate in a free market**

Reagan was the second president to focus on economic rights, and he did so in terms of “economic freedoms.” These freedoms strongly resonated with a public that had grown to view government as curtailing the rights and freedoms of individual citizens. A government that taxed too much of an individual’s fruits of labor and investment. A government that created individual dependency rather than encourage individual responsibility.

Both FDR’s and Reagan’s statement on economic rights and economic freedoms set the stage for the debate on the appropriate role of government in our economy. Is the role that of investing in our infrastructure? Is the role that of protecting our environment and our consumption of the goods essential to our survival as human beings (food, water, air)? Is the role of government to provide for a “safety net” for those most vulnerable in a free-enterprise economy? Is the role of government to ensure our economic freedoms and instill individual responsibility?

(7) Slide seven:

## **A LEGACY OF ECONOMIC GROWTH**

**Land of opportunity**

**Importance of education**

**Investment in infrastructure**

**Research and technology**

From the beginning, our economy was built on the assumption of growth. A growing economy provides jobs for a growing population, the means for improving one's quality of life (pursuit of happiness), the opportunity for upward mobility, both socially and economically, and the necessary funds for supporting government.

In our earliest days as thirteen colonies and later as independent States, our primary means of growth came from land and natural resources. The fastest way to economic security if not wealth was the accumulation of land and the production of goods (timber, food, tobacco). But Jefferson well recognized at our founding that education was a major source of potential growth. Washington also at our founding well realized the importance of investing in an infrastructure that supported a growing economy. That investment has taken many forms from canals to roads to an interstate highway system. And finally, a major source of economic growth has come from advances in research and technology. In fact, economists estimate that one-half of our growth historically has come from R&D. All of this meant jobs and opportunity for an economy that has gone through any number of recessions, a great depression and two major cycles of what is termed "industrial revolutions." Such industrial revolutions occur when the economy is engulfed with new technologies that create new industries and products and greatly expand the potential for the economy to grow. The examples are well known. The train replacing the carriage. The automobile replacing the horse. The steamship replacing the clipper ship. The list is impressive: electricity, electronics, internet. You name it. But in the process of economic expansion driven by R&D jobs were lost and workers were displaced. Those entrepreneurs on the cutting edge of change became wealthy. But eventually new jobs were created and new investors competed away the wealth and income inequality that initially occurred. The economy settled on a new path of sustained growth that benefited all.

But the latest industrial revolution, termed by the press as "the third great wave" signifying that this is the third major industrial revolution to impact our free-enterprise economy since our founding, has been different. True to course, jobs have been displaced. Great inequality in the distribution of income and wealth has occurred. Those entrepreneurs on the cutting edge, the "high tech" generation in Silicon Valley and Seattle and elsewhere, have accumulated massive economic wealth and power. And millions of new jobs have been created to replace those that lost out. But most of those new jobs are not high paying and secure as the new ones created post-industrial revolutions in the past. The concentration of wealth and power among the new high tech entrepreneurs has not diminished over time, but has grown. Our economy is becoming more monopolized, more concentrated, more unequal. Our government is not investing in our infrastructure or in education or in research and technology as it did in the past. And our potential for sustained growth has diminished.

**SESSION FIVE: EDUCATION: THE GREAT EQUALIZER**  
**SESSION SIX: WE THE PEOPLE: A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS**

All of this sets the stage for a good discussion and debate on the questions suggested on page 100. Have at it!

Note: Slides and suggested presentation points for these two sessions will follow once they are developed.