

## IN AMERICA, WE'VE GOT IT MADE

*By Fred Hobbs*

In a recent gathering with friends, the conversation turned to the subject of American exceptionalism. Is our culture and way of life unique? Superior to all others on the planet? Increasingly, isn't the United States just one of the neighborhoods in the big global village and, if so, is that good or bad? Like most such discussions in which participants have no way of coming up with a definitive conclusion, the conversation drifted from the abstract to the more concrete. Namely, an agreement that despite fractious political discourse, loss of lives from questionable wars, pockets of poverty, and a host of less dramatic imperfections, comparatively, in America, we've got it made.

We embrace this notion by promoting "pride of place" in commerce and pop culture under the rubric "Made in America." Though many of us purchase and enjoy cars, TVs and many of today's incredible new communication tools with origins in foreign lands, a big push is on to buy American.

Festivals and trade shows highlight American-made products. An on-line America-made retail guide lists more than 2,500 items made in the USA and sold in retail stores such as Dillard's Home Depot and Costco.

The rosier Made in America scenario involves the big-ticket items. The government loans to the big auto companies that literally saved a major American industry with General Motors ascending from the brink of disaster to becoming number one in the world. Most aircraft and related equipment, agriculture and energy-related machinery and parts are made in America.

U.S. manufacturing has moved more and more upscale and become more efficient, as the less-expensive consumer items now tend to come from overseas. America remains by far the world's leading manufacturer by value of goods produced; more than \$1.6 trillion dollars, nearly double the figure 20 years ago.

For the average Joe or Jane, the Made in America message can be spread in many ways. An on-line Made in America store offers military-themed t-shirts with the slogan printed prominently. The outlet, located in Elma, New York, offers such quintessentially American items as Jack Daniels playing cards, beer themed cowboy hats (with labels for Coors, Bud Light, etc.) A Made in America supporter can order beef jerky, chipotle-style or a bocce ball set, to celebrate our country's diversity. DVDs portraying major moments in U.S. history are also available through the store along with copies of the hilarious movie starring Whoopi Goldberg and Ted Danson titled, of course, "Made in America." And, don't forget country star Toby Keith's song of the same name in which his daddy is said to lament "it breaks his heart when he sees a foreign car."

The cleverest use of the phrase "Made in America," though, comes from the supporters of the President of the United States. Available on the Internet and perhaps distributed elsewhere, is a coffee mug inscribed with those very words. On the other side of the cup there is an image of the document proving to a handful of over-zealous and woefully ill-informed detractors the truth of the president's place of birth. The official "Certificate of Live Birth" from the state of Hawaii, shows clearly that Barack Obama was truly "Made in America".

