

A 4TH OF JULY MESSAGE FROM TWO OF MY FAVORITES

Stephen L. Bakke – July 4, 2011

Thomas Sowell is the Rose and Milton Friedman Senior Fellow, The Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

Victor Davis Hanson, a classicist and military historian, is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and a recipient of the 2007 National Humanities Medal.

I have chosen portions of both presentations.

July 4th By Thomas Sowell

The Fourth of July may be just a holiday for fireworks to some people. But it was a momentous day for the history of this country and the history of the world.

Not only did July 4, 1776 mark American independence from England, it marked a radically different kind of government from the governments that prevailed around the world at the time -- and the kinds of governments that had prevailed for thousands of years before.

The American Revolution was not simply a rebellion against the King of England, it was a rebellion against being ruled by kings in general. That is why the opening salvo of the American Revolution was called "the shot heard round the world."

Autocratic rulers and their subjects heard that shot -- and things that had not been questioned for millennia were now open to challenge. As the generations went by, more and more autocratic governments around the world proved unable to meet that challenge.

Some clever people today ask whether the United States has really been "exceptional." You couldn't be more exceptional in the 18th century than to create your fundamental document -- the Constitution of the United States -- by opening with the momentous words, "We the people..."

Those three words were a slap in the face to those who thought themselves entitled to rule, and who regarded the people as if they were simply human livestock, destined to be herded and shepherded by their betters. Indeed, to this very day, elites who think that way -- and that includes many among the intelligentsia, as well as political messiahs -- find the Constitution of the United States a real pain because it stands in the way of their imposing their will and their presumptions on the rest of us.

More than a hundred years ago, so-called "Progressives" began a campaign to undermine the Constitution's strict limitations on government, which stood in the way of self-anointed political crusaders imposing their grand schemes on all the rest of us. That effort to discredit the Constitution continues to this day, and the arguments haven't really changed much in a hundred years.

The cover story in the July 4th issue of Time magazine is a classic example of this arrogance. It asks of the Constitution: "Does it still matter?"

A long and rambling essay by Time magazine's managing editor, Richard Stengel, manages to create a toxic blend of the irrelevant and the erroneous.

The irrelevant comes first, pointing out in big letters that those who wrote the Constitution "did not know about" all sorts of things in the world today, including airplanes, television, computers and DNA.

This may seem like a clever new gambit but, like many clever new gambits, it is a rehash of arguments made long ago. Back in 1908, Woodrow Wilson said, "When the Constitution was framed there were no railways, there was no telegraph, there was no telephone,"

In Mr. Stengel's rehash of this argument, he declares: "People on the right and left constantly ask what the framers would say about some event that is happening today."

Maybe that kind of talk goes on where he hangs out. But most people have enough common sense to know that a constitution does not exist to micro-manage particular "events" or express opinions about the passing scene.

A constitution exists to create a framework for government -- and the Constitution of the United States tries to keep the government inside that framework.

From the irrelevant to the erroneous is a short step for Mr. Stengel. He says, "If the Constitution was intended to limit the federal government, it certainly doesn't say so."

Apparently Mr. Stengel has not read the Tenth Amendment: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

Perhaps Richard Stengel should follow the advice of another Stengel -- Casey Stengel, who said on a number of occasions, "You could look it up."

Does the Constitution matter? If it doesn't, then your Freedom doesn't matter.

An Exceptional 4th of July By Victor Davis Hanson

For the last 235 years, on the Fourth of July, Americans have celebrated the birth of the United States, and the founding ideas that have made it the most powerful, wealthiest and freest nation in the history of civilization.

Our revolutionaries shouted "Don't tread on me!" and "Give me liberty or give me death!" **The Founders were convinced that constitutionally protected freedom would allow the individual to create wealth apart from government. Such enlightened self-interest would then enrich society at large far more effectively that could an all-powerful state.**

Such constitutionally protected private property, free enterprise and market capitalism explain why the United States -- with only about 4.5 percent of the world's population -- even today, in an intensely competitive global economy, still produces a quarter of the world's goods and services. **To make America unexceptional, inept government overseers, as elsewhere in the world, would determine the conditions -- where, when, how and by whom -- under which businesses operate.**

The Founders' notion of the rule of law, coupled with freedom of the individual, explains why the United States runs on merit, not tribal affinities or birth. Most elsewhere, being a first cousin of a government official, or having a prestigious name, ensures special treatment from the state. Yet in America, nepotism is never assured. End that notion of American merit and replace it with racial tribalism, cronyism or aristocratic privilege, and America itself would vanish as we know it.

There is no rational reason why a small republican experiment in 1776 grew to dominate global culture and society -- except that America is the only nation, past or present, that put trust in the individual rather than in the state and its elite bureaucracy. Such confidence in the average free citizen made America absolutely exceptional -- something we should remember more than ever on this Fourth of July.