

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

RUN OF THE MILL STATUS FOR THE UNITED STATES! IS THAT WHAT WE WANT?



By Stephen L. Bakke  July 5, 2014

Here's what provoked me:

On July 4th and 5th I read with astonishment two opinion articles, NOT letters to the editor. The message in both was that boldly proclaiming "American Exceptionalism" is probably not accurate, and really silly and embarrassing. I began to realize that these dudes were satisfied with, and even preferred, a United States that is just "run of the mill." This common "progressive" impression comes from not understanding the origin of the concept of American Exceptionalism. It's not an example of braggadocio or a statement of national hubris. It expresses unique differences, not superiority. I had to take a crack at expressing this truth!

Here's my response:

"Run-of-the-Mill" Status for the United States? Is That What We Want?

Re: "Three family activities for the July 4th holiday," July 4 – John Crisp states: "I'm not fond of the language of 'American Exceptionalism,' the idea (of) a 'shining city on a hill,' chosen by God for some profound spiritual purpose it's tacky to talk about it too much." He goes on to suggest alternative things to be doing and thinking about.

On July 5, John Rosenberg offers similar sentiments in "A modest America." He is pleased with the preference by some to eliminate superlatives when referring to America and her trivial details.

I suggest we back up and remember what "American Exceptionalism" really reflects. It's not an example of braggadocio or a statement of national hubris. It expresses unique differences, not superiority. These differences spring from the original motivation of our founders, the extent to which they studied history to learn about various forms of governments, and the basic tenants expressed in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution – created equal, endowed by Creator, unalienable rights, and power from the people.

It emphasizes inherent liberty, with power derived from consent of the governed. This form of government was never attempted anywhere else before, or after, the birth of the United States. It's entirely wrong to define American Exceptionalism as a visceral, emotional reaction to feelings of superiority.



A totally different, but legitimate, debate is: "Has this exceptionally conceived country performed in an exceptional way?" Let's agree where we can, and place the "performance evaluation" in a separate argument.