



🇺🇸 CREATED EQUAL, ENDOWED BY OUR CREATOR, UNALIENABLE RIGHTS, POWER FROM THE PEOPLE – THAT’S AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM!

Superiority? That’s a legitimate, but separate, debate!

Stephen L. Bakke 🇺🇸 February 22, 2012

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are **created equal**, that they are **endowed by their Creator** with certain **unalienable Rights**, that among these are **Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness**. – That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just **powers from the consent of the governed** – from the Declaration of Independence*

The position of the Americans is therefore quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one. – from French Political Thinker and Historian Alexis de Tocqueville’s work, “Democracy in America, Volume I” 1835 (Yes, I have it and have read “at it” – tough goin’!)

American Exceptionalism – A Controversial Concept? Is It Really?

The term “American Exceptionalism” (also referred to in this report as AE) has come into common use in recent years, and has been the “lit fuse” for disagreement as to its meaning and for related policy implications. I decided to devote a section of my website to the general subject of American Exceptionalism, and since I made that decision my concept of AE has changed a bit. The change is for the better I think, as it not only clarifies for me the original intended meaning of AE, but it also actually provides a broader basis for agreement between liberals and conservatives! This report discusses what is meant by AE at the very highest level – its original meaning!

American Exceptionalism? – It’s About Our Country’s Unique DIFFERENCES! – It’s NOT a Statement of Superiority

Here is what we need to remember:

- **At the highest level of analysis, American Exceptionalism declares America’s unique differences, not its 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 our Constitution – endowed by creator, unalienable rights, emphasis on **liberty**, with **power derived from consent of the governed** (hence “We the People”).
- AE has nothing to do with blind nationalism! It really is all about the form of government that was selected, and the concepts and philosophies behind the final choices. **This form of**

government was never attempted anywhere else before, or after, the birth of the U.S. Therefore, it is truly most exceptional!

*A Mrs. Powel of Philadelphia asked Benjamin Franklin, "Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?" With no hesitation whatsoever, Franklin responded, "**A republic, if you can keep it.**" – Comments made outside Independence Hall after adjournment of the Constitutional Convention of 1787*

*"A republic, if you can keep it." In a single sentence, Dr. Franklin summed up the extraordinary drama that would play out for all of American history between **the two vital forces that sustain American Exceptionalism: freedom and responsibility** Notably, the Founding Fathers created a republic instead of a direct democracy. – Newt Gingrich*

- The Founding Principles manifested themselves by inspiring a "representative republic," checks and balances among the branches of government and between that government, the states, and its citizens - and very importantly, specific limitations on the power of the federal government. **This was never done before and hasn't really been accomplished since our founding – hence "American Exceptionalism."**
- No nation had ever before declared such a broad emphasis on God-given equality, liberty, and inherent rights. And never before had been applied the concept of sovereignty of individual citizens, rather than sovereignty of government.



***America is exceptional because, unlike any other nation, it is dedicated to the principles of human liberty, grounded on the truths that all men are created equal and endowed with equal rights.** To this day, so many years after the American Revolution, these principles – proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence and promulgated by the United States Constitution – still define America as a nation and a people. – Matthew Spalding, Ph.D., Director of the B. Kenneth Simon Center for American Studies at The Heritage Foundation.*

We should not intend, nor should others interpret, that using the term "American Exceptionalism" is an expression of nationalistic hubris!

Can We Apply the Term American Exceptionalism to U.S. Performance at Home and Abroad? – Can We Claim Superiority?

In spite of the purity and clarity of thought expressed in the ideal, highest level of American Exceptionalism, there still is a need to acknowledge there can be something deeper, visceral, and more emotional about our attachment to America. Such emotions can run high, and are just fine to have – but this is where further debate begins. It has nothing to do with our unique fundamentals of government. It has everything to do with "What have we done with our exceptional, unique opportunity?" This leads to debate – a very legitimate debate.

When we start analyzing, applying, and projecting the implications of AE, it's inevitable that we eventually get to those things that cause serious disagreement and rigorous argument. These inevitable disagreements stem from the variety of attitudes, opinions, cultural identification, and political affiliations. They most often relate to vastly different visions for the role of the federal government in the lives of citizens, and in the international community.

That part of the debate is about how this exceptional form of government has manifested itself and whether or not we like or dislike what has evolved. **At a future date I will develop reports on whether or not we have used our uniqueness and exceptionalism appropriately. Have we appropriately seized our opportunity? Have we used our exceptionalism in a way we can praise or in a way we should reject?**

There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. – American author and poet Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)