

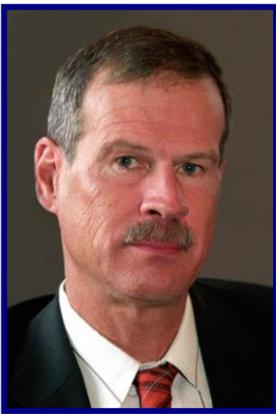


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AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM... *EXPOSED*

By Walter A. McDougall



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*In 2010 Sarah Palin toured the United States promoting "Tea Party" candidates and her new book titled *America by Heart: Reflections on Family, Faith, and Flag*. Her persistent theme was American Exceptionalism, which she considered an article of faith to all patriots but an embarrassment to President Obama to judge from his notorious interview in the Financial Times. By 2012 it seemed the Republican presidential candidates openly vied for the mantle of most zealous defender of exceptionalism against Obama's suspiciously European values. What a surprise, therefore, when at the Democratic Convention the usually wooden John Kerry made a fiery speech that chanted "exceptional" fourteen times, branded his own party's values as such, and hurled the issue back in Republicans' faces. Of course, it was demagogic-as-usual on both sides. But it also exposed the schism over U.S. identity that had been widening since the end of the Cold War. That is because exceptionalism, a concept that is not sui generis, not very old, and not even American in conception, has come to serve as code for the American Civil Religion that dare not speak its name.*

What does it mean to say the United States is exceptional? If it just means unique, then the claim is unexceptional because no two countries are exactly alike. If it just means that Americans have *believed* their country is special, then (as a British skeptic writes) there is "nothing exceptional about this exceptionalism. All great nations cherish national myths."¹ If it means that the U.S.A. was exceptionally virtuous given its precocious dedication to civil and religious liberty, equality, justice, prosperity, social mobility, and peace and harmony with all nations, then ipso facto the U.S.A. is exceptionally vicious for falling so short of those ideals. If the term means rather that Americans are somehow exempted from the laws of entropy governing other nations—that (as Bismarck reportedly quipped) "God has a special providence for fools, drunks, and the United States of America"—then such exceptionalism can only be proven *sub specie aeternitatis*. Indeed, the very illusion that a nation is under divine dispensation may

1. Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University, 2009), p. 14. What earned Obama his scolding from Palin and later from candidates such as Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney was his suggestion that the Brits, Greeks, and all nations think they are exceptional. Thus, in the delightful words of Richard Gamble, "he finessed exceptionalism with a postmodern flair that rendered his words anything but an affirmation of American uniqueness" (*The American Conservative* <Sept. 2012>, p. 13). Then, in a news conference on April 2, 2012, Obama anticipated the far more effective riposte that Kerry would make: "It's worth noting that I first arrived on the national stage with a speech at the Democratic Convention that was entirely about American exceptionalism and that my entire career has been a testimony to American exceptionalism." See Devin Dwyer column at <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/04/obama-rebuffs-romney>

perversely inspire the pride that goeth before a fall (“thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God”) or the many bad ends to which reckless adolescents are prone. Finally, if American Exceptionalism means that its power, values, and “indispensable” status render the United States exempt from the rules of behavior *it makes and enforces on other nations*, then enemies, neutrals, and allies alike are sure to push back.²

For these reasons “exceptionalism” is more trouble and probably even more danger than it’s worth: it either means nothing at all or altogether too much. But the principal reason to banish the term from *historical* discourse is that the icky, polysyllabic, Latinate moniker did not even exist until the mid-20th century! No Puritan colonist, no founding Patriot, no Civil War statesman, no 19th century poet, pastor, or propagandist employed the word. To be sure, most of them believed the United States to be an historic undertaking, even a “new order for the ages.” But far from believing their nation to be an *exception* to the rules of nature governing other men and nations, they both *hoped* their example would transform the whole world and *feared* that a lack of republican virtue would doom their experiment. In neither case would Americans stand apart from the rest of the human race.

Not until 1835 did a foreigner, Alexis de Tocqueville, catalogue the features of New World democracy and conclude: “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.”³ Note, however, that he applied the term to Americans’ *position* rather than to the people themselves, and argued that American institutions and values were the very *opposite of universal*. In any event, his adjectival usage had no echo and inspired no noun—no “ism”—among Americans themselves. Exceptionalism as some sort of birthright is an anachronism!

Flash forward to 1906 when another foreigner, German sociologist Werner Sombart, asked why the United States seemed unique among industrial, urban societies in that its working classes showed no interest in the ideology or politics of Socialism. He identified many reasons why American workers seemed content with capitalism, but nowhere did Sombart employ any word that could be fairly translated as exceptionalism. He referred instead to the “idiosyncrasies of the spiritual culture” (*Eigenart der geistigen Kultur*) or “American popular soul” (*die Eigenarten der amerikanische Volksseele*). But what was the source of this spirit? Must one hypothesize that it just dropped from the heavens “on the chosen people” (*auf das auserwählte Volk*)? Not at all, he insisted, because the same entrepreneurial spirit could be found in London or Berlin. It was just purer and far more pervasive in the United States thanks to such factors as the Protestant ethic, democratic consensus, two-party system, high standard of living, social mobility, and safety-valve of an open frontier. For Sombart Americans occupied an extreme on the sociological spectrum, but were not exceptional, not “off the charts.”⁴

The real origins of the notion of an exceptional United States lurk in the recondite disputations of the two greatest

2. There is a large body of scholarship on the civil religious self-identification of Americans as a new Chosen People in a New Israel. Almost all authors have depicted that identity as a source of national unity, strength, and purpose, or else damned it as a source of self-righteousness and cruelty toward various “others” from Pequots to Vietnamese. Very few examine the sheer angst caused by the identity, but two who do are Todd Gitlin and Liel Leibovitz, *The Chosen Peoples: America, Israel, and the Ordeals of Divine Election* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010). There is also a large body of scholarship, mostly by structural realists in International Relations, predicting that claims of the sort Americans habitually make court certain resistance. See, for instance, Stephen M. Walt, “The Myth of American Exceptionalism,” *Foreign Policy* (Nov. 2011) at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/the_myth_of_american_exceptionalism

3. The passage continues as follows: “Their strictly Puritanical origin, their exclusively commercial habits, even the country they inhabit, which seems to divert their minds from the pursuit of science, literature, and the arts, the proximity of Europe, which allows them to neglect these pursuits without relapsing into barbarism, a thousand special causes, of which I have only been able to point out the most important, have singularly concurred to fix the mind of the American upon purely practical objects. His passions, his wants, his education, and everything about him seem to unite in drawing the native of the United States earthward; his religion alone bids him turn, from time to time, a transient and distracted glance to heaven. Let us cease, then, to view all democratic nations under the example of the American people”: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols. (New York: Langley, 1840), II: 36-37.

4. Werner Sombart, *Warum gibt es in den Vereinigten Staaten keinen Sozialismus?* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1906) and *Why There is No Socialism in the United States*, Patricia M. Hocking and C. T. Husbands, trans. (White Plains, NY: International Arts and Sciences, 1976), esp. the passages on pp. 10-15. Sombart kicked off a disputation among American leftists and sociologists that has now lasted more than a century. See Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn’t Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

transnational movements in the early twentieth century: the Catholic Church and the Communist International. Both had reason to fear that Americans might be immune to their presumptively universal appeals. Ever since 1784, when Bishop John Carroll set up the first Catholic diocese in the United States, the Vatican displayed confusion about how to grow a doctrinal, hierarchical church in a mostly Protestant land that enjoyed religious freedom and material plenty. A century later European prelates grew alarmed by reports from American bishops about the erosion of doctrine and obedience among Catholic immigrants and their children. (European rabbis were equally alarmed about Jewish immigrants.) In 1899 Pope Leo XIII issued an encyclical, *Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae*, that condemned a heresy called Americanism, a name to which “there is no reason to take exception.” The encyclical attributed this Americanism to the nation’s revolutionary origins, individualism, Anglo-Saxon culture, liberalism, egalitarianism, and separation of Church and State, all of which tempted American Catholics to stray from the straight and narrow path.⁵

Finally, in the 1920s, the American Communist Party leader Jay Lovestone rendered a diagnosis of American society that echoed those of Sombart and the Vatican. His purpose was to explain why his comrades’ agitation and propaganda had achieved so little by way of organizing the factory workers of Pittsburgh or Detroit. The reason was, argued Lovestone, that capitalism in the United States was exceptionally productive and stable, which made it hard to “raise their consciousness,” which meant the proletarian revolution would take much longer than elsewhere to develop. The report engendered discreet discussion, mostly in Russian journals, until Soviet dictator Josef Stalin anathematized the theory as a form of deviationism. Then Wall Street crashed and the American Communist Party coined the term, in its April 1930, in the form of an *obituary*. “The storm of the economic crisis in the United States,” it proclaimed, “blew down the house of cards of American exceptionalism.”⁶

How then did the term become a fetish? It remained in currency among leftist intellectuals throughout the 1930s when even the Great Depression did little to radicalize American workers, and the 1940s when World War II propelled the United States to global dominance. Then the Cold War broke out, at which point it was probably just a matter of time before somebody turned the Stalinist term of derision into a patriotic badge of honor and ait stamped it over all of American history. As it happened, that somebody was Max Lerner, a former editor of *The Nation* turned Cold War liberal and author of the one-thousand page *America as a Civilization* (1957). That was the book with the famous quote: “Every man has two countries—his own and America.” Lerner was careful to reject “spread-eagle theorists seeking to depict America as immune from the forces of history and the laws of life.” He also sensed how the “no Socialism in America” theories could be used to tar all dissent as subversive. Still, he concluded that “these distortions should not blind us to the valid elements in the theory of exceptionalism.... America represents, as I have stressed above, the naked embodiment of the most dynamic elements of modern Western history.”⁷ He also traced it back to the “slaying of the European father” by colonial Patriots, so it is tempting to suspect that the Russian-born Lerner projected his own assimilative wish-fulfillment on to the founders of his adopted country.

Exceptionalism dovetailed perfectly with a new orthodoxy among political scientists that extolled what Harvard professor Louis Hartz called America’s Liberal Tradition. Born free of an aristocracy and national church, Americans had no need for Europe’s ideological radicalism or, for that matter, anti-ideological conservatism. Historians such as Daniel Boorstin, soon to be Librarian of Congress, traced American Exceptionalism back to Plymouth Rock and made it the principal trope of a generation of textbooks. Sociologists such as Seymour Martin Lipset put the concept to good use as a heuristic device.⁸ Most of all, the idea of an America set apart by Providence

5. To the Archbishop of Baltimore “Concerning New Opinions, Virtue, Nature and Grace, with Regard to Americanism,” Jan. 22, 1899: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/113teste.htm>

6. See Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone, Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster* (New York: Random House, 1999); and Terrence McCoy, “How Joseph Stalin Invented ‘American Exceptionalism,’” at <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/03/how-joseph-stalin-invented-american-exceptionalism/254534/>

7. Max Lerner, *America as a Civilization, Life and Thought in the United States Today* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), pp. 64-65.

8. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955). On the scholarly uses of exceptionalism, see *inter alia* Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics: The*

and endowed with a special mission to reform (not to say redeem) the whole human race dovetailed perfectly with the political rhetoric needed to rally Americans to lead the Free World in what amounted to a “holy war” against “godless Communism.”

Those were the years when the Truman and Eisenhower administrations assiduously courted ecumenical religious support for the Cold War, both at home and abroad. Those were years when the United States both recognized Israel and courted Muslims, bankrolled Christian Democrats in Europe, and established diplomatic relations with the Vatican. Those were the years when the “Judaean-Christian tradition” became a civilizational motto and the White House encouraged (former Communist) Will Herberg to codify the civil faith in *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (1955). Those were the years when “Under God” was added to the Pledge of Allegiance and Eisenhower famously said, “our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is.”⁹ Those were the years when presidential rhetoric became steeped in what sociologist Robert Bellah called “God-Talk,” and the Catholic John F. Kennedy, to Bellah's surprise, played the American Civil Religion's high priest better than anyone prior to Ronald Reagan.

If the term was of Cold War vintage, how come computerized word-searches show that references to American Exceptionalism exploded—literally from hundreds to tens of thousands—only *after* the Cold War was over? My historian's instinct tells me the question itself is the answer: the Cold War was over, globalization and multiculturalism were the new trends, and American identity got contested as never before. What made exceptionalist rhetoric ubiquitous was the fact it was now contested and therefore deployed by almost all sides in the cultural wars of the 1990s, foreign wars of the 2000s, and political wars of the 2010s.¹⁰

In sum, the myth of American Exceptionalism, ironically inspired by Roman Catholics and Marxists, entered our lexicon as historical gloss for the campaign to persuade a skeptical, war-weary people that global commitments such as the UN, Truman Doctrine, and NATO were not really a break with tradition, but a fulfillment of the nation's hoariest, holiest calling.¹¹ Exceptionalism was not an archetype of the Promised Land but an artifact of the Crusader State.

Promise of Disharmony (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1981); Daniel Bell, “‘American Exceptionalism’ Revisited: The Role of Civil Society,” *The Public Interest* 95, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 38-56; Byron Shafer, ed., *Is America Different? A New Look at American Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University, 1991); Ian Tyrrell, “American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History,” *American Historical Review* 96 (Oct. 1991): 1031-72; Michael Kammen, “The Problem of American Exceptionalism: A Reconsideration,” *American Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (March 1993): 1-43; Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996); Jack P. Greene, *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity From 1492 to 1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997); David W. Noble, *The Death of the Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2002).

9. Eisenhower Address at the Freedoms Foundation, Waldorf-Astoria, New York City (Dec. 22, 1952). For an excellent reconstruction and analysis of that misunderstood speech see Patrick Henry, “And I Don't Care What It Is”: The Tradition-History Of A Civil Religion Proof-Text,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (March 1981): 35-47. On the mobilization of religious faith in the early Cold War, see William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: the Soul of Containment* (New York: Cambridge University, 2008); T. Jeremy Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and the Forging of an American National Religion* (New York: ABC-CLIO, 2008); and Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Knopf, 2012).

10. The inaugural issue of a new journal *American Political Thought* 1: 1 (Spring 2012) was entirely devoted to “American Exceptionalism: Is It Real, Is It Good?” Articles include James W. Ceaser, “The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism,” pp. 3-27; Patrick J. Deneen, “Cities of Man on a Hill,” pp. 29-52; Hilde Eliassen Restad, “Old Paradigms in History Die Hard in Political Science: U.S. Foreign Policy and American Exceptionalism,” pp. 53-76; Peter S. Onuf, “American Exceptionalism and National Identity,” pp. 77-99. The fact that Onuf describes “dueling Exceptionalisms,” Deneen “two cities on a hill,” and Restad a “foreign policy dichotomy” between exemplarists and missionaries, makes it clear that not only the validity but the content of American exceptionalism is hotly contested.

11. Historian Andrew J. Bacevich, an unabashed declinist, argues that the myth of an exceptional American calling to steer the course of world history and free all mankind grew up with the American Century proclaimed by *TIME* magazine publisher Henry Luce in 1941 and is now dying from defeats and deficits at the end of the “short American Century” seventy years later. See Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008, and Bacevich, ed., *The Short American Century: A Postmortem* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2012).

In my 1997 book *Promised Land, Crusader State* I myself trusted in the conventional wisdom when I wrote: “The evidence that the colonists believed that America was a holy land (that is, ‘set apart’) is so abundant as to be trite. As early as 1630, Massachusetts Governor John Winthrop implored his people ‘to Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are uppon us.’”¹² I took for granted that my teachers and textbooks were right when they traced our national identity back to the Puritans beginning with Winthrop’s *Model of Christian Charity*. Composed on board the ship *Arbella* bound for the New World, it seemed the elegant spiritual companion to the Pilgrims’ *Mayflower Compact*. Inspired by Moses’ farewell address in *Deuteronomy*, it implied that the colonists were a new Israel entering a new Promised Land. Like Moses, Winthrop promised his people great blessings if they obeyed the Lord’s commands, but warned that if they did not, then they would be cast out and become a byword among nations. Finally, he borrowed a New Testament image when he imagined New England *as a city on a hill* called to inspire the whole human race by its example. All my life I trusted that cherished account of our nation’s genesis, but the dogged literary excavations of historian Richard Gamble have now exposed it as myth. It turns out that Winthrop’s manuscript, far from serving as keynote address of the American pageant, was either *unknown or forgotten* until it turned up in the family archives in 1809. Donated to the New York Historical Society, it slept for another three decades before publication in a Massachusetts collection of colonial documents in 1838.¹³

In any case Winthrop bequeathed no political manifesto. The famous “City on a Hill” passage appears in the Sermon on the Mount as one in a list of metaphors Jesus uses to describe his disciples. He speaks of them as the salt of the earth, the light of the world, a city on a hill, and a lamp not hidden under a bushel. The passage served as text for many a sermon preached by colonial divines, not least Jonathan Edwards. But those pastors were quoting the *Bible* to make *theological* points to *Christian* audiences; none was quoting *Winthrop* to make *political* points to *American* audiences. What has been lost “in the fierce crossfire of the battle to define the American identity,” Gamble writes, is “the story not of how the metaphor helped make America what it is today but the story of how America helped make the metaphor what it never was.” For even after its publication Winthrop’s sermon attracted little attention. America’s most influential 19th century historian, George Bancroft, did not mention the phrase “city upon a hill” until the sixteenth edition of his *History of the United States* in 1858 and even then did not connect it with Winthrop.¹⁴

Nor did anyone else until 1930, the year Harvard historian Perry Miller undertook the research that would shape the way two generations of American students conceived of *The New England Mind*, the title of his initial 1939 work. Reinhold Niebuhr once described Miller, a native Midwesterner, as a “believing non-believer” given to “therapeutic history.” He certainly made it his mission to repackage the dreary Puritan Forefathers as a messianic people whose “errand into the wilderness” was to fashion a City on a Hill destined to redeem Old England and then all mankind.¹⁵ That interpretation had become orthodoxy by 1958 when Boorstin made “A City Upon a Hill” the title of the first volume in *The Americans* series. It became political currency in 1961 when President-Elect (and Harvard graduate) John F. Kennedy delivered his own “City on a Hill” farewell address to Massachusetts General Court. Gamble writes: “By the time of their deaths a few weeks apart in 1963, the scholar <Miller> and the statesman <Kennedy> had left behind a city more secularized, politicized and malleable than ever before.” Predictably, revisionist historians came along to challenge the thesis that the Puritans were a sort of “special ops forces on a mission to remake the world.” But they lost all hope of retaking their turf in 1976 when the eloquent, earnest Ronald Reagan

12. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), p. 17.

13. Richard M. Gamble, *In Search of the City on a Hill: The Making and Unmaking of an American Myth* (London: Continuum, 2012). The “city upon a hill” appears in *Matthew 5:13*.

14. Gamble, *City on a Hill*, pp. 1-119 (quote, p. 5).

15. When Miller began his research the reputation of the Puritans had sunk to its all-time low as a consequence of secular Progressivism, disillusionment with Wilsonianism, the hedonism of the Roaring Twenties, and the slashing satire of H. L. Mencken.

tacked an adjective on to Winthrop's phrase and made "The Shining City on a Hill" his political mantra.¹⁶

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So what if the *ur*-historical claims made for Winthrop's phrase are no more accurate than those made for exceptionalism? Do not the truths they symbolize about the American colonists' faith in a New World redemptive mission remain valid? Well, yes—and no, because common sense should tell us that New Worlds cannot baptize themselves! Only people from a self-conscious Old World can conjure or recognize a New World, which is exactly what happened in the centuries after 1492. The British companies and proprietors that planted the thirteen North American colonies cleverly marketed ideas of a pristine New World as a ploy to attract capital and labor to their emerging markets and real estate speculations. To quote that British skeptic of exceptionalism again, not even the Puritans were "impelled by a unique or exceptional American impulse. On the contrary, they were products of European education, European culture, European piety, and they were engaged in a great European quarrel." Some 140 years later American representatives did gather in Philadelphia and bravely reject European rule, but the principles they invoked were rooted in "the beliefs of the English Revolution and the Whig tradition, in the English, Scots, and French Enlightenments, and in the ancient principles of the English Common Law—in short, in the core beliefs of a European civilization."¹⁷ Throw in Anglican and Calvinist Christianity and the map of Americans' extraordinary, but not exceptional, DNA is complete.

In any case, Winthrop's Puritan descendants did not invent the United States by themselves. They were but one of four "cradle cultures," the others being the Virginia Cavaliers, Pennsylvania Quakers, and wild Scots-Irish on the Appalachian frontier. Their distinct notions of liberty all contributed to the design of U.S. institutions, but all were British imports.¹⁸ Likewise, when Americans turned their gazes westward or overseas, they displayed ipso facto the British imperial spirits bred in their bones, including rural and mercantile capitalism, anti-Catholicism, restless expansion, and (it must be said) racial hierarchy.¹⁹

The historically valid, if not politically correct, bottom line is that *neither the "City on a Hill" exceptionalist myth of the right nor the "Three Worlds Meet" multiculturalist myth of the left* bears close examination.²⁰ Walter Russell

16. Gamble, *City on a Hill*, pp. 121-84 (quotes, pp. 124-5, 168). One authoritative critique of the Miller thesis was Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596-1728* (New York, Oxford University, 1971). For a breezy summary of the hustling materialism and idiosyncratic spirituality of Puritan New England see the relevant portions of Walter A. McDougall, *Freedom Just Around the Corner: A New American History, 1585-1828* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

17. Hodgson, *Myth of American Exceptionalism*, p. 9.

18. This is the subject of David Hackett Fischer's classic *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University, 1989). In *Freedom Just Around the Corner*, pp. 136-67, I summarized Fischer's four cradle cultures and added two more groups that were numerous and important if politically impotent: Germans and enslaved Africans. It goes without saying that "liberty" was as contested then as it is today. See Daniel T. Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics Since Independence* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); J.C.D., *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (New York: Cambridge University, 1994); and most recently Michael Jan Rozbicki, *Culture and Liberty in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2011), which stresses the British aristocratic origins of the American colonists' notions of liberty.

19. On the intellectual formation of the people who became founders of the United States, see, just for starters, the works of such great historians as Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood, J.C.D. Clark, and Jack P. Greene. J.G.A. Pocock, "Between Gog and Magog: The Republican Thesis and the *Ideologia Americana*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48, no. 2 (April 1987): 325-46, includes a puckish passage (pp. 341-42) that chides historians such as John Diggins who so disembody the American Founders that they seem to believe the United States of America was a matter of John Locke's word made flesh.

20. The "Three Worlds Meet" theorists held that the society and culture that formed the United States was a unique blend of African, Amerindian, and European influences. They dominated the 1990s debates over national history standards and their template inspired many textbooks. Perhaps the best argument for a genuine American Exceptionalism and New World culture can be made for the case of *Latin America* because the Creoles liberally mixed genes and cultures with Amerindians. See David A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492-1866* (New York: Cambridge University, 1991). Another good

Mead, who dubbed Britain and America the Walrus and Carpenter, put it another way when he lamented how little appreciated it is that “the values, ideas, and attitudes that Americans think are part of America’s unique exceptionalism actually came to us from Great Britain.” I learned from Mead’s book that even that American penchant for what I celebrated as “creative corruption” in *Freedom Just Around the Corner: A New American History*, was characteristic of England as early as 1705: “Thus every Part was full of Vice, / Yet the whole Mass a Paradise ... And Vertue, who from Politicks / had learn’d a Thousand cunning Tricks, / Was, by their happy Influence, / Made Friends with Vice: And ever since / The worst of all the Multitude / Did something for the common Good.”²¹

Finally, and most pertinent to contemporary debates, the wise *strategic principles* embraced by America’s Founders were borrowed from British Whig statecraft. The first principle was *unshakeable unity at home*, which meant suppressing all particularism on the part of the Scots, Irish, and Welsh so that foreign powers could not meddle in British politics and the energies of the United Kingdom could be mobilized for expansion. The final achievement of that in the Parliamentary Acts of Union in 1707 was a powerful precedent for America’s Patriots and Constitutional Framers. A second principle recommended by British strategy was the constant *pursuit of a favorable peace* through aloofness toward the continental powers when possible and temporary alliances in emergency. That in turn enabled the British to *cultivate from offshore a balance of power* in Europe while they pursued *unfettered expansion, navigation, and commerce* with all countries. Indeed, such a maritime grand strategy was even more promising for the United States than it had been for the United Kingdom and United Provinces because the America was so much *larger, remoter, and more richly endowed* than the lands of the British and Dutch. That is why Washington, Hamilton, and virtually all their successors concluded that no power on earth could thwart the rise of the United States to continental empire except (heaven forbid) the American people themselves.²²

Perhaps the cause of whatever became special about us lay “not in our stars or in ourselves,” but in our geography. As STRATFOR’s George Friedman bluntly suggests, “Americans are not important because of who they are, but because of where they live.”²³ I would not go that far, but I take his point. Americans have always been tempted to think that because they live in God’s Country they must be God’s Elect. Such faith has its uses, for instance to motivate a free and disparate people to rally and sacrifice in times of crisis. But it verges on idolatry from the standpoint of Biblical religion and—if exploited for partisan purposes—verges on heresy from the standpoint of civil religion. My plea, therefore, to politicians and pundits in both parties is to debate foreign policy in terms of the *national interest* (we can no longer afford to do otherwise) and if tempted to play the exceptionalist card, *shut up!*

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foil to New England is New France (Québec) where Champlain really did try to enlist Native American tribes in the creation of a tolerant, multi-cultural colony. See David Hackett Fischer, *Champlain’s Dream* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), published in commemoration of Canada’s quadricentennial.

21. Bernard de Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees* cited by Walter Russell Mead, *God and Gold: Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Knopf, 2007), p 302. The prior quotation is from p. 47. Mead adds: “Commerce, the English language, democratic political institutions, and the Christian religion: these were the blessings the Anglo-Saxons would bring to the world; these were also the instruments that would allow them to rule it” (p. 53).

22. See McDougall, “History and Strategies: Grand, Maritime, and American,” Center for Naval Analysis Conference Report (November 2011); available on-line at: <http://www.fpri.org/telegram/201110.mcdougall.strategy.html>.

23. Friedman, “The Geopolitics of the United States, Part 1: The Inevitable Empire” (May 2012) at: <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/geopolitics-united-states-part-1-inevitable-empire>