

## The Claim of U.S. Exceptionalism within a Context of Race, Gender and Class Inequality

Julian B. Roebuck, Komanduri S. Murty\*

*Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Fort Valley State University, USA*

*\*Corresponding Author: Komanduri S. Murty, Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Fort Valley State University, USA, Email: murtyk@fvsu.edu*

### ABSTRACT

*American exceptionalism has gained considerable attention among scholars and political leaders alike. Some scholars pointed out that the presence and extent of U.S. exceptionalism is that procedural political democracy has been spelled out in the U.S. legal system; that is, universal participation; political equality; majority rule; representative democracy; and, governmental responses to public opinion—all under the rule of law. However, there is no U.S. official definition of, or call for any kind of, or control of economic equality; though, in fact much economic inequality has always existed in the U.S.; and moreover, is now increasing at a more rapid rate than in the past. And yet, the U.S. politicians, especially those running for the presidency, find it necessary to consider American exceptionalism as an article of faith that must be accepted and promulgated. This article attempts to shed some light on America's so-called exceptionalism and the need of an equalized economic society.*

**Keywords:** *Civil Rights; Liberalism; Manifest Destiny; human rights; Great Depression; cultural knowledge; political parties; economic inequality; grid locking.*

### INTRODUCTION

American exceptionalism is currently the subject of many books, scholarly articles, and popular publications. Though the statements supporting this concept have varied somewhat over the years in format, articulation and presentation, a central core of claims and doctrines remain intact: that is, the presumptions that American values, political and economic systems, and history remain unique, and superior to that of other nations; and, that the U.S. is both destined and entitled to play a distinct and positive role on the world stage (Walt 2011). Others have claimed that the U.S. is the greatest and most commendable nation on earth, and the leader and protector of the free and democratic worlds; and that therefore it must maintain a strong and an ever-ready military force (Restad 2015; Richard 2012). The hubris of such claims is mindful of the doctrines of former president Theodore Roosevelt, a war monger par excellence. Perhaps more Americans should read Edward Gibbon's classic work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that met the needs of many but was finally brought down with the great help of the rise of Christianity.

### SOME BRIEF HISTORICAL NOTES ON AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

The idea that the United States has been singled out by God's providence to play a redemptive and regenerative role in human world-wide affairs has become one of the most frequently heard shibboleths of the hard right in the United States; though, it is hard to distinguish between those who believe it, and those who enunciate it as a political weapon (see Lewis 2011). And some scholars still absurdly maintain that fundamental Christian values remain a part of U.S. exceptionalism (Bradley 2011). Accordingly, the United States may act as an exemplary nation at times, or as a more regenerative country that is intervening in world affairs for the universal good at other times. Consciousness of an exemplary nation or land preceded the founding of the nation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The New England puritans saw their migration to the new world as an enactment of the biblical Exodus; that is, a move to the "promised land." John Winthrop wrote that "We shall be as a shining city upon a hill; the eyes of all the people are upon us." Another early example of this belief is a quote from the Federalist Papers (in 1788), wherein Alexander Hamilton describes the American political experiment as one of

universal relevance for the future of all people. He said, “It seems to have been reserved to the people of this country to decide, by their conduct and example, the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not, of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force” (Bailey 2012:18). The revolutionary generation saw the Revolutionary War as a world event.

Later on, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed that those who died in the battle at Gettysburg gave their lives so that “government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth” (Prothero 2013, Para 7). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century many Americans came to think of themselves as a more regenerative nation rather than an exemplary one. On April 2, 1917, when President Woodrow Wilson asked the U.S. Congress to declare war on Germany, he stated: “We are glad to fight this war for the ultimate peace of the world, and for the liberation of the people...” President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (arguably the most democratic president the U.S. ever had with the help of his Vice President Henry A. Wallace) told the U.S. Congress on July 6, 1942, when the U.S. entered World War II: “Our objectives are clear, establishing and securing the freedom of speech and religion, and the removal of fear and want—everywhere in the world” (Rosenbaum and Brinkley 2003:120).

William Graham Sumner, an eminent professor of sociology at Yale University delivered a speech in 1899 entitled *The Conquest of the United States by Spain*, that argued against U.S. expansion, imperialism, and war—all he said were against the best traditions, principles, and interests of the American people; and, that a war would plunge us into a network of difficult problems and political perils, that we might have avoided; and, which offers us no corresponding advantage in return (Sumner 1911:326). Richard Gamble noted that Sumner feared the then so-called “new exceptionalism”—the belief that Americans were somehow secure from changing circumstances, immune to limits on power and resources, and exempt from the impact of war and empire that had seduced the public into believing that their prosperity, liberty, and security were inevitable blessings accruing to a special people, rather than to the fragile products of abundant land, a small population, and benign neighbors. Once these circumstances changed, America would discover

that liberty and democracy required hard work to sustain” (Gamble 2012: Para 21).

The George W. Bush administration was marked by U.S. military invasions into several countries; war in Iraq and nation building—all in so-called noble causes. Since then the U.S. has engaged in military invasions of Afghanistan, Libya, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen at the costs of millions of lives, and heavy costs of millions of dollars in defense spending—that could have been spent on more worthy needs. Bush’s major difficulties began with the Homeland Security Act passed during his first term in office in response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on U.S. soil, that denoted the de-territorializing of U.S. citizens; and, the global extension of U.S. imperialism whether in military, economic, or political terms; thereby challenging the ideology of American exceptionalism (Meinel 2014).

### ADDITIONAL EARLY HISTORICAL NOTES

So-called democracy did not come to America on the Mayflower. While New Englanders were governed by a white clerical oligarchy the middle and southern colonies were ruled by white landowning settlers and plantation owners (many of whom owned African American slaves). Everywhere it was generally accepted that elites should rule, and that common folk should defer to their betters especially in governmental affairs. This acquiescence prevailed in the main until the two presidential “spoils” system” terms of Andrew Jackson (1829-37); that is, despite the July 4, 1776 Declaration of Independence, the adoption of the U.S. Constitution in 1787, and the passage of the Bill of Rights in 1793. All of these democratic documents were applied to whites, but not to African Americans or to U.S. Indians (Native Americans) (Guyatt 2016; Tocqueville 2002). However, the absence in the new world of feudal institutions, a hereditary class system and a dynamic frontier provided a partial leveling effect that has been overemphasized.

Despite some leveling forces, Andrew Jackson’s spoils system did not promote any individual, social class, or racial democracy. He distrusted the Eastern U.S. liberal elites; promoted atyrranny of majority rule; maintained a strong sense of white identity for himself and others; expressed and demonstrated a violent policy toward other races than whites; assured an air of superiority as a slave owner, Indian fighter, slaughterer, and remover of Native Americans (Cha 2015). Even Alexis de Tocqueville, who

studied some forms of democracy in America from 1871-1932 noted the undemocratic divisions of the U.S. population into three races (whites, Indians/native Americans and blacks) and the problems thereto that have existed in many ways to the present day. He even suggested the miscegenation of whites and blacks as a plausible solution to black-white racial problems, a very radical view at that time (see Guyatt 2016).

Currently, American exceptionalism has become an article of faith that must be accepted and promulgated by U.S. politicians, especially those running for the presidency. For example, Hillary Clinton in several of her political speeches during the last presidential nomination process enunciated statements such as: “Most of all, Americans are indispensable and exceptional because of our values. So let us never stop claiming good and being great. Let’s keep America exceptional.” Barak Obama was chided by many for making the following response to a question at the 2009 G-20 summit press conference: “I believe in American Exceptionalism just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British Exceptionalism, and the Greeks believe in Greek Exceptionalism” (Bigelow 2012: Para 10).

Donald Trump, a billionaire, speaks of “Making the U.S. great again” though he has picked a cabinet of right wing billionaires and millionaires; has announced an aggressive nationalistic policy wherein billions of dollars must be spent on national defense, the military; and proclaimed an extensive and questionable immigration ethnic curtailment plan; while at the same time calling for drastically reducing the taxes and deregulating corporate restrictions to benefit the members of the richest capitalistic class (top 1% of the U.S. population)—a trickle down economic policy that has been tried often before and consistently failed. And where does the money come from to support his erratic democratic plans while at the same time providing help for the working class? The song and dance man is not a magician (according to many); and, he will probably be called out soon as just another rash, rich champion of the superrich (see Rapoport, Abramowitz, and Stone 2016).

One difficult and complex problem facing those who wish to examine the presence and extent of U.S. exceptionalism, as Janda et al. (2012) and Reich (2015) point out, is that procedural political democracy has been spelled out in the U.S. legal system; that is, universal participation; political equality; majority rule; representative

democracy; and, governmental responses to public opinion—all under the rule of law. However, there is no U.S. official definition of, or call for any kind of, or control of economic equality; though, in fact much economic inequality has always existed in the U.S.; and moreover, is now increasing at a more rapid rate than in the past (see Grusky and Hill 2018). The following analysis attempts to shed some light on America’s so-called exceptionalism and the need of a more equalized economic society.

### SOME ILLUSTRATIVE CONTEMPORARY VIEWS

A review of the research literature during the past twenty years on American exceptionalism discloses that authors on this subject became interested in this topic during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century as a means of explaining just why socialism had not caught on in the U.S. as it had in other countries. Perhaps fewer Bernie Sanders (a senator from Vermont) were around then as now; and, perhaps fewer astute economists were about to note the rapid increase in U.S. economic inequality). And as Bradley Lewis (2011) has pointed out, current writers on U.S. exceptionalism vary on the definition of this slipping topic. These authors agree with Lewis from their review of the literature on this subject, wherein they find a mélange of views expressed by various writers that could be placed roughly in two different but confusing camps: that is, (1) views that have championed U.S. exceptionalism while at the same time debunking it; and, (2) views that debunk the concept in an analytic and reasonable fashion. Some illustrative views on this contradictory subject follow.

James Q. Wilson, a long-term political scientist at UCLA and Harvard University, has expressed some views debunking U.S. exceptionalism while at the same time accepting and praising others. He first has noted that many U.S. scholars find that the U.S. is in decline; that is, in comparison with other rich nations in regards to: the support and provision of public education; universal governmental health care; voter participation; provision of a strong labor movement. He also notes that the U.S. is behind other western nations in adequate welfare and unemployment services; is the only rich country without a government universal health care system; has fewer governmental employees than many other countries; has no strong socialist party; and sadly, has an acceptable higher crime and incarceration rates; that is, as compared to

other rich countries. Despite these negative factors, Wilson suggests that certain U.S. exceptional characteristics outweigh them. For example, he claims that: (1) the U.S. has a higher standard of living than has other rich countries; (2) has a more liberal enlightened constitution; (3) has a superior political system and political culture than other nations and has a unique Bill of Rights; (4) has lower tax rates than other rich countries; and, (5) the U.S. is the leading country for the destination of many immigrants—who are well integrated and intermarried into the U.S. general population (see also Schuck 2016).

We tend to disagree with 2, 3, and 5 above. Over the years of our teaching careers in the U.S. from coast to coast, we observed that most white citizens who were not reared in central big cities like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles prefer that only a limited number of immigrants should be accepted by the U.S.; and that most of these should be preferably whites from western European countries; and that marriage is highly preferable among couples of the same white “race.” Perhaps more people including some scholars should take a closer look at the apparent whites (and their gender) among the members of the U.S. Congress and their staff. Additionally, rich people should pay their fair share of taxes.

Further, the claimed so-called “glad hands” for U.S. immigrants reminds one of these authors of Dr. O.E. Baker (one of his graduate school population professors years ago, who also was employed as a U.S. population expert in some U.S. government agency) who lectured that the physical resources of the world were limited; were not inexhaustible; and that eventually the overflow of hungry people in overcrowded countries wherein the physical resources were depleted would eventually migrate peacefully or violently into less crowded countries (that afforded more ample physical and social resources). The questions are: If and when should rich countries with ample resources let in immigrants? If so, what kind of immigrants should they be? Immigration is a complicated economic, political, geographical, and complex issue that all rich nations face. Needless to say, there will always be plenty of refugees at hand from war torn and poor countries to be taken care of—where should they be taken care of? He claims that the U.S. has superior political and economic systems and superior political cultures are highly questionable. Finally, other countries should check out their own political

and economic systems and change them if necessary—and not to imitate those in the U.S.

Noam Chomsky (2016), a world-renowned political dissident and professor emeritus at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, points out that the subject of American exceptionalism is a mixed bag for many U.S. scholars and politicians, including himself. First he says that the U.S., unlike other countries, is defined by a set of universal, political, and economic values (namely—liberty; democracy; equality; private property and markets); and, that the U.S. has a transcendent purpose to establish equality and freedom in the U.S. as well as in the rest of the world (just like that in the U.S.). Others have disagreed. On the negative side, he observes that a recent international poll by WIN Gallup has found that the U.S. ranks as: (1) the leading mistrusting country in the world for world peace; (2) that the U.S. claim of exceptionalism has been negated by the most respected scholars in England; (3) that the U.S. has pushed the English out as the leader of the world and tried to replace her; (4) that the U.S. has rejected plausible decisions of the World Court; (5) that the U.S. has not accepted the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court; (6) that the U.S. invaded Iraq and made war; (7) that the U.S. has rejected several plausible decisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; (8) that the U.S. has acted at times as a rogue state, and feels free to resort to force at will in violation of international law; (9) that the U.S. has always acted harshly toward Cuba; and, has taken on isolationist actions toward this country—and the negative list goes on according to him and some other unnamed scholars. Yet, Chomsky concludes brashly that the leaders of the World should adopt as guidelines the necessary work to make the claimed model of U.S. exceptionalism come true, especially in its foreign policy measures (Chomsky 2016). We strongly disagree with this last point because there is no perfect democracy, so why try to make one?

James A. Holifield, professor of political science and director of the Tower Center at Southern Methodist University, declared in his article entitled *Debunking American and Rescuing Liberalism* (2015) that we rescue liberalism from the right and make the slogans of U.S. Exceptionalism come true (though he does not point out how this can be done). In so doing he praises the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and its shift in racial immigration policy. Again, why try to create a utopia? The world’s famous philosophers have failed to

envision a perfect utopia, though some claim that George Hegel and Karl Marx come close.

### THE MYTH OF AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

Stephen M. Walt, professor of international affairs at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, describes and analyzes American Exceptionalism within a historical (up to 2011) cultural mythological format that these authors agree with and adopt herein; that is as paraphrased, authenticated, and supported with some of their own historical and current supporting data. Walt explains how Americans by focusing on their supposedly exceptional qualities have blinded themselves to the ways they are a lot like everyone else (meaning other great powers):

#### Myth1

*There is Something Exceptional About "American Exceptionalism"*; that is, different from that of other powers; and that these differences have required its leaders to take on special burdens. However, most other great powers have mistakenly (at times) considered themselves special and superior to others. Thinking you are special among many nations is the norm, not the exception. Many great powers have believed that they were advancing some greater good in the world when they imposed their policies on others. The British have enunciated the "white man's burden" while the French colonialists at one time invoked la mission civilisatrice to justify their empire. Portugal did likewise. Rome was Rome without comparison, so said the Romans. Many officials of the Soviet Union believed they were leading the world to a socialist utopia; and that brings Hegel and Karl Marx (despite some of their plausible ideas) would have agreed. There are no fixed economic laws and no such thing as scientific socialism (Walt 2011). Still some Americans claim a U.S. providence. President Obama was right when he reminded all that all countries praise their own political qualities. So again the U.S. claim to superiority is the norm, but not the exception.

#### Myth2

*The United States Behaves Better Than Other Nations Do.* This is negated by the fact that the U.S. has been one of the most expansionist countries in modern history. Beginning as 13 small colonies it extended itself across North America, sieging by military force Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and California from Mexico in 1846; and, while along the way eliminating

most of the native population; and, confining its survivors on impoverished Indian reservations. Soon after 1619, America's African Americans were enslaved, and have been treated differently and mistreated since; that is, as race relations in the U.S. clearly demonstrate. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the U.S. had pushed Britain out of the Pacific northwest and consolidated its hegemony over the western Hemisphere. By the 1880s, the U.S. had created a continental white settlers empire. Following the Cuban revolution with Spain, the U.S. needlessly declared war on Spain; and, at her defeat in 1898 gained control over five island territories with over 11 million inhabitants including the Philippines and the Hawaiian archipelagoes as well as Guam, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. +The suppression of Filipino freedom fighters later on by the U.S. military and American sugar and fruit companies following their rebelling sled to a messy civil war. The Platt Amendment set the terms of Cuban independence in what would become a common pattern of Proxy Empire; that is, "formal intedere rule" by those who cooperated with American business men; that is, with military intervention if necessary. This Plattismo as Latin Americans called it became the characteristic structure of "American empire" throughout the western Hemisphere (see Bacevich 2002; Parkinson 2016; Kinzer 2017).

The grab of the Panama Canal Zone by force and the later construction of the Panama Canal; and, its operation is another example of U.S. empire building by territory grabs with military force. Over time, the American colonists, or later the U.S. has engaged in many wars; e.g., the French and India wars of 1689-97 and the French and Indian War, 1754-63 that pushed the French out of America and made for American territorial increase later on; the Revolutionary War, 1775-83; War of 1812-14; Mexican American War, 1846-48; Civil War, 1861-65; World War I, 1914-18; World War II, 1941-45; Vietnam War, 1957-75; Korean War, 1950-53; the Iraq war and the invasions of Libya, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Syria; nation buildings and terrorists killings, and incarcerations under the George W. Bush and later U.S. administrations. The behavior of the U.S. in these conflicts has been no more humane than that of its adversaries. Steven Weinberg(2003) points out that the U.S. backed the wrong side (the rich landowners) in the contra war in Nicaragua, wherein 30,000 Nicaraguans were killed; and, that currently U.S. drones and Special Forces

are killing suspected terrorists and innocent civilians in at least five different countries.

In brief, U.S. leaders have done what they thought they had to do just as what other national leaders have done elsewhere when faced with what they have perceived as destructive foreign dangers; and have paid little attention to moral principles in so doing. George W. Bush administration's water boardings is another case in point here among many others, along with the incarcerations without trial at Gitmo. The mass bombing of German cities toward the near-end of World War II is still another example, wherein thousands of German civilians were killed. Many Germans still hold these mass bombings against the U.S. because they claim they were unnecessary and brutal; that is, the war had already been lost according to them (These bitter feelings are verified by one of the authors who lived in Germany immediately after World War II and at other brief times since). So, the claim that the U.S. is uniquely virtuous may be comforting to many Americans, but it is simply not true.

Further, and very importantly, white Americans, frequently called Anglo Americans, have never treated the so-called U.S. people of color; e.g., African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian Indians, Filipinos, Orientals (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese), Puerto Ricans, Haitians, Cubans, Central Americans, and African immigrants as equals (Wills 2003, 2005; Gordon-Reed and Onuf 2016; Guyatt 2016; Parkinson 2016).

### Myth3

*America's Success is Due to its Special Genius.* Americans tend to attribute their rise to world power as a direct result of the brilliant political insights of their founding fathers; their special views on freedom; the virtue of the unique and sacred U.S. Constitution; the priority of individual liberty; the creativity and hard work of its people, etc. It is true that many immigrants have come to the U.S. in drives in search of economic opportunity; to escape from their despotic political leaders, poverty or war, etc.; and that U.S. scientific and technological achievements and economic opportunity are deserving of praise. However, as a new nation the U.S. was lavishly endowed with rich natural resources; traversed by large navigable rivers; founded far from competing great powers; populated with a dispersed in-advanced native population that was susceptible to European diseases; and a population without fire arms for

its defense. Additionally, the European great powers were at war during the new republic's early history which facilitated its expansion across the continent. Therefore, America's success as a nation owed more to good fortune than to any claimed (personage)special genius or Manifest Destiny (a self-fulfilling prophecy) which claimed that "providence" caused the westward advance of the colonists from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean (and the possession of all of this territory within these boundaries). The Louisiana Purchase was bought by Thomas Jefferson and the French and Indian wars were won primarily by England. And as to the insightful political views of the American founding fathers, they were far from original. In fact, they originated with the empiricists, philosophers of the British Isles: John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume, along with the political view and influences of the Frenchman Voltaire, Charles Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Still further legal scholars have found that American constitutionalism is neither unique nor sacred; that is, that the U.S. Constitution as well as other official U.S. documents in format and content are quite similar to that of other such official documents found in the historic records of some other nations (see Versteeg and Zackin 2014); and, England's Magna Carta of 1215 A.D.

### Myth4

*The U.S. is Responsible for Most of the Good in the World.* The specious claims for this myth follow: The provision of a superior democratic political system; positive international development; the spread and promotion of democracy and freedom throughout the world; the development of a U.S. style world order in an open economic system; free trade; contributions to peace and human rights; and ethnic equality. Some of these claims may be in part true; but, the claim that all good things come from Washington, D.C. and the rest of the U.S. overstates U.S. contributions to the world by a wide margin. One of the authors lived in D.C. for 12 years and when he arrived there, he was told, "If you want a friend here, buy a dog!" One of the first things he found out about the U.S. government was its gridlocks. Moreover, he found that the claim of peace, human rights, and ethnic equality in Washington, D.C. and the rest of the U.S. was a very bad joke.

### Myth5

*God is on Our Side.* This absurd metaphysical claim is counterproductive and mindful of the

same hubris expressed by Ancient Athens, Napoleonic France, imperial Japan, and some other countries that have faced catastrophic results from their hegemonic endeavors. Despite America's many material successes, it has encountered many dire problems and setbacks during the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and according to many scholars, it is now facing additional problems in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, some authors note that the U.S. has been in decline since the Vietnam War (1957-75), that is, in comparison with other wealthy nations; e.g., the failure of its unique and unsuccessful employee and private insurance company health care system; increase in public school dropouts; lower high school graduates; the dearth of national spending on public education; poor salaries for public school teachers; lower percent of its gross domestic product spent on infrastructure in comparison with that of many other countries; ever-increasing college and university tuition fees and other costs; high student debt that permits only the rich students to enroll in its prestigious universities; the error of spending more on prisons than on their universities; that the U.S. furnishes less upward economic mobility than that found in many European Countries; has more governmental gridlock than many European countries; that the U.S. is in the midst of relinquishing its pre-eminence on many levels (that is, in comparison with other rich nations); that the U.S. population has been overexposed to so-called "American exceptionalism" via the movies, cartoons, comics, the media and other entities for all their lives; that the majority of the people in the U.S. won't admit that the U.S. has defects like every other country in the world. This last listed collective denial forces politicians to lie should they expect to be elected. Finally, politicians in the two major different U.S. political parties degrade one another and the other's constituents rather than cooperating to fix the country's problems (Krugman 2008; Mathews 2017; Rachman 2017).

In his recent book *Our Revolution: A Future to Believe In*, Bernie Sanders, one Democratic presidential candidate in 2016, agrees with much of what Krugman (2008) and Noah (2012) have found, while also noting that in 2008 the United States suffered its worst economic downturn since the U.S. Great Depression (1929-41). According to many economic experts, this horrific recession was precipitated by the passage of legislation enacted during Bill Clinton's administration that deregulated Wall

Street, and promoted legislation that rendered large financial and tax interests to the richest capitalistic class in the U.S. Sanders states in his recent book that among other things, money dominates and intervenes in everything that goes on in the U.S. Congress; and that Wall Street, the pharmaceutical industry, the coal and oil companies, agribusiness, and the rest of Corporate America spend billions annually on lobbying and other governmental pressures that support the rich. In Washington, you get what you pay for. He says that the rich and powerful are well attended to; though the pain of working-class families is ignored.

One former U.S. president, Jimmy Carter, during his re-election "malaise speech" of 1980 told the truth about the bad economic conditions existing in the U.S. during his four years as president; and, he lectured to the people in this speech about some structural changes that had to be made in the U.S. political and economic systems. Thereby he carried only four states one election year later. Obviously, the U.S. people did not want to hear about the awful economic and political situation in the U.S., but only to hear about things that supported their sickness; that is, U.S. exceptionalism.

Timothy Noah (2012), a prominent U.S. journalist, documents and analyzes the economic problems that fester and receive support from the rich and their backers in his book *The Great Divergence: America's Growing Inequality Crisis and What We Can Do About It*; that is, the extreme level and growth rate of inequality in income and wealth in the U.S. population; that is, as compared with that of most of the organizations for Economic Cooperation and Developed Countries (the leading world democracies). He points out that the U.S. has dropped to 29<sup>th</sup> place (just above Mexico) when one calculates the ratio of median income to the highest income below the threshold for the bottom 10 percent; and that when one calculates the percentage of national income that has gone to the top 10 percent, the U.S. is the champion among other western countries. The measured income distribution in the U.S. is more unequal than that of any other OECD nation; and that as of 2007 the American richest 1 percent possessed nearly 24 percent of the nation's pretax income. Today annual income in the U.S. is more unequal than in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Also, he finds that income heritability is greater and economic mobility upward is lower in the

U.S. than in Denmark, Australia, Norway, Finland, Canada, Sweden, Germany, Spain, France, and Italy. He also finds that most of the western European countries provide more adequate health care to its people and a greater economic safety net for the poor and unemployed than does the U.S. In brief, the American Dream is really a fictitious wish and so is the claim of U.S. exceptionalism. According to Noah, the upper class is growing smaller and much richer, the middle class is getting much smaller and poorer, and the lower class (where African Americans and working-class whites are highly concentrated) is getting much larger and poorer. The African American middle class members as well as the white middle class members are decreasing; and, the very large national lower class is gaining in numbers and getting even poorer—and African Americans are more segregated in slum areas than ever before along with an increase in single motherhood and other problems of family life in slum areas.

The Republican party's attempts with success to reduce the size and power of all welfare programs; to apply the infamous and erroneous trickle down and supply side theory; to reduce many necessary governmental regulations on corporate and business enterprises; to reduce the percentage of income taxes on the rich; to reduce taxes on big business and corporate enterprises and activities; to reduce all property taxes of the rich, including capital gains; to minimize the power of labor unions as well as their membership. All of this has created a subclass of very rich men along with their money managers, lobbyists, and "conservative" political party members, who serve them in an "unequal government." Further, this subclass blocks (in the House of Representatives and Senate) any federal or state programs that benefit the poor and middle class; and backs those government programs that support the rich. Eighty-one percent of the U.S. stocks are owned by the top 10 percent of the U.S. population. Does this inequality indicative of a democracy?

### Myth6

*America has produced (birthed) a majority of World's most distinguished people in the crucial fields of human cultural knowledge, such as World Literature, World History, Philosophy, Religion, Fine Arts, Geography, Economics, Physical Science, Mathematics, Medicine, etc.* This is an extension of Professor Walt's list of

myths of exceptionalism. Many historical sources suggest that it is a farcical and erroneous claim. For example, Hirsch, Kett, and Trefil (2002) suggest that Eastern religious philosophy (Hinduism and Buddhism) influenced the views of Western philosophers like Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1840), and Jurgen Habermas (1929- ). None of these were born in the U.S., but in Germany. And, many of the distinguished scholars who claim U.S. citizenship are foreign-born. Therefore, America birthed a majority of brilliant scholars is a far-stretched reality.

### WHAT TO DO PROPOSALS

Noah (2012) recommends the following illustrative remedies to reduce the ever-expanding income inequality in the U.S.: an increase in the federal income tax rates including dividends and capital gains) of those earning \$250,000 or more a year; eliminating shelter schemes for the rich; deduction of tax credits that enrich the already rich; eliminating the U.S. regressive FICA payroll tax; fattening government payrolls that benefit the poor and middle class; universalizing government funded preschool; imposing price controls on colleges and universities (e.g., tuition and other costs); regulating wall street; breaking up big banks ownership; electing Democratic presidents; reviving the labor union movement; and, restricting money transfers by the rich to foreign bank accounts to evade taxes; and, importing more skilled labor. In brief, Noah says "we must soak the rich."

Paul Krugman (2008) and Joseph E. Stiglitz (2012), two Nobel laureate economists support Noah's economic analysis. Additionally, Stiglitz proposes that the U.S. Government block the American financial brokers from politically engineering market advantages (e.g., rent seeking); block economic returns that are derived via U.S. government's pending giveaways to big businesses without effective regulations; and, reducing the influence that corporations and the wealthy have over every aspect of American governance for the rich. He also insists that the huge growing income divide between the richest 1 percent and the other 99 percent is the defining characteristic of a thoroughly sick U.S. economy. Further, he points out that though we are the richest nation in the world, yet we are heavily in debt; that our poverty levels are higher than those in the European countries; that the U.S. economic model is bloated and sick; and, that the American people spend for more



on health care than those of other countries (while leaving millions uninsured). He also suggests greater federal spending to state and local governments for their public welfare needs (health and economic); increasing and enforcing the number of corporate regulations; stopping the existing deregulation of corporations' financial markets; stopping "rent seeking"; blocking the lobbying power of powerful CEOs and financial executives over the U.S. Congress; regulating financial contributions to those running for election to congress; stopping the gridlock and filibustering in congress; eliminating the federal subsidies and tax breaks for the oil and gas companies, pharmaceutical companies, and other business entrepreneurs of the super-rich; inaugurating severe tax increases on property and income taxes (including capital gains) for those in the top income brackets; inaugurating stiffer and more effective anti-trust laws; helping increase the number, power, and membership of labor unions; reducing the number and power of big money donors to members of congress; increasing income federal funds for the unemployed, Medicare, Medicaid, and welfare funds for the poor; taxing heavily the overseas property and bank accounts of the rich corporations. He also calls for changes in the U.S. economic system that will improve the living conditions of the poor who live in segregated slums; and, who must live on declining incomes in a country with rising debt and an ageing population. Richard Rothstein (2004) confirms Stiglitz's position that education and income gaps between African American and white families is widening too fast and must be stopped.

### DISCUSSION

Most U.S. politicians and the public at large seem to ignore the U.S. inequality problem examined above; or, attribute to clashes between the two dominant U.S. political parties; or, consider it a normal condition; or, accept it as a problem too hard to solve, "so live with it because there has always been the rich and the poor." Some say there was a mass migration from the Republican to the Democratic party, beginning in the 1950s. These authors have found that now the leaders in each party consist also of doctors, lawyers, the clergy, architects, engineers, economists, international developers, political scientists, corporate money managers and planners, computer programmers, aerospace designers, elite university professors, media intellectuals, and professional politicians. Many of these leaders think of themselves as

superior, meritocratic, virtuous, credential deserving, and politically adept people. Actually, they comprise a social and economic hierarchy, many of whom profess some anti-working-class views; that is, a good society (to them) should honor and reward educational excellence and economic success. Social class lines should also be preserved; and that what is best for them is also best for the rest of society, because they know how to govern. Some of these elites are limousine liberals, conservatives or in-betweens, who argue that the kinds of market-oriented policies like free trade and other forms of deregulations are in tune with inevitable modernizing and globalizing forces. Though at the same time they are attuned to (or pretend to be attuned to) such popular issues as: women's rights; gender issues; gender-neutral bathrooms; climate change (a serious matter); racial justice; sexual freedom; environmentalism; cultural tolerance; human rights abroad; abortion rights; gun possessions; and, higher education.

Moreover, the general population of the U.S. does not seem to be concerned with specific working-class issues like a higher minimum wage, labor union membership and financial support, universal governmental health care, tax reform issues for the poor but not the rich; more economic equality; the increasing rate of inequality in U.S. annual incomes and wealth; the unfair political and economic power of those in the top one percent bracket of income and wealth; need of the redistribution of U.S. wealth; stricter regulation of wall street; the breakup of big banks; the poor working conditions and low wages of the blue-collar working class; the need of free college and university education; need of greater governmental economic assistance to lower-class members (especially African Americans who live in slum neighborhoods), the need of a strong democratic socialist party (see Frank 2016; Fraser 2016; Oppenheimer 2016).

### CONCLUSION

In sum, neither of the U.S. political parties seem to be very much interested in the serious economic inequality problem in the U.S.; and, much too busy with grid locking; fighting; re-elections; and, grabbing political power and control. Perhaps we should examine more closely some of the European Scandinavian countries' welfare state economic and political structural systems; and, consider some of the remedies suggested by Timothy Noah. Without peaceful structural changes, there is a great

likelihood of such change through and by violence. Certainly the U.S. has no claim to an exceptional economic or political system; that is, in any positive equalitarian way.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Bacevich, Andrew J. (2002). *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.
- [2] Bailey, Bill (2012). *The Complete Federalist Papers by Hamilton, Madison & Jay: The Federalist Papers Project*. Accessed on 4/15/17 [<http://www.thefederalistpapers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/The-Complete-Federalist-Papers.pdf>]
- [3] Bigelow, William (August 9, 2012). Obama promotes American Exceptionalism? *Breitbart*. Accessed on 4/15/17 [<http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2012/08/09/obama-now-promotes-american-exceptionalism/>]
- [4] Bradley, V. Lewis (2011). American Exceptionalism: From a political theory to an article of faith. *America Magazine* 205(9):19-22. Accessed on 4/15/17 [<http://www.americamagazine.org/issue/788/article/american-exceptionalism>]
- [5] Cha, Taesuh (2015). American Exceptionalism at the Crossroads: Three Responses. *Political Studies Review* 13(3):351-362.
- [6] Chomsky, Noam (2016). American Exceptionalism: Some Current Case Studies. *Raritan* 35(4):1-10. Accessed on 3/28/17 [<http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=2ea2a95f-381e-4116-9ca5-bc9680e906b0%40sessionmgr103&vid=2&hid=126>]
- [7] Frank, Thomas (2016). *Listen, Liberal: Or, What Ever Happened to the Party of the People?* New York, NY: Metropolitan/Henry Holt.
- [8] Fraser, Steve (2016). *The Limousine Liberal: How an Incendiary Image United the Right and Fractured America*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- [9] Gamble, Richard (September 4, 2012). American Exceptionalism: The ole kept us out of conflict; the new leads to empire. *The American Conservative*. Accessed on 4/15/17 [<http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/american-exceptionalisms/>]
- [10] Gordon-Reed, Annette & Peter S. Onuf (2016). *“Most Blessed of the Patriarchs”: Thomas Jefferson and Empire of the Imagination*. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing.
- [11] Grusky, David B. & Jasmine Hill (2018). *Inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- [12] Guyatt, Nicholas (2016). *Bind Us Apart: How Enlightened Americans Invented Racial Segregation*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- [13] Hirsch, E.D., Joseph F. Kett & James Trefil (2002). *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- [14] Holifield, James F. (2015). Debunking American Exceptionalism and Rescuing Liberalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38(8): 1312-18.
- [15] Janda, Kenneth; Jeffrey M. Berry, Jerry Goldman & Kevin W. Hula (2012). *The Challenge of Democracy: American Government in Global Politics*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston, MA: Wadsworth. Accessed on 3/27/17 [[http://www.professorcrain.org/uploads/6/4/0/4/6404463/kenneth\\_janda,\\_jeffrey\\_m\\_berry,\\_jerry\\_goldman,\\_kevin\\_w\\_hula-the\\_challenge\\_of\\_democracy\\_essentials\\_\\_american\\_government\\_in\\_global\\_politics-wadsworth\\_publishing\\_\(2011\).pdf](http://www.professorcrain.org/uploads/6/4/0/4/6404463/kenneth_janda,_jeffrey_m_berry,_jerry_goldman,_kevin_w_hula-the_challenge_of_democracy_essentials__american_government_in_global_politics-wadsworth_publishing_(2011).pdf)]
- [16] Kinzer, Stephen (2017). *The True Flag: Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, and the Birth of the American Empire*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.
- [17] Krugman, Paul (2008). *End This Depression Now*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- [18] Lewis, Bradley (October 3, 2011). American Exceptionalism: From a political theory to an article of faith. *America Magazine* 205(9):19-22. Accessed on 3/27/17 [<http://www.americamagazine.org/issue/788/article/american-exceptionalism>]
- [19] Mathews, Jessica T. (April 11, 2017). Can China Replace the West? *The New York Review of Books* LXIV (8):14-16. Accessed on 5/4/17 [<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/05/11/easternization-can-china-replace-the-west/>]
- [20] Meinel, Dietmar (2014). And when everyone is super [...] no one will be: The limits of American Exceptionalism in The Incredibles. *European Journal of American Culture* 33(3):181-194.
- [21] Noah, Timothy (2012). *The Great Divergence: America’s Growing Inequality Crisis and What We Can Do About It*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press.
- [22] Oppenheimer, Daniel (2016). *Exit Right: The People Who Left the Left and Reshaped the American Century*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- [23] Parkinson, Robert G. (2016). *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- [24] Prothero, Stephen (November 19, 2013). Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, 150 Years Later. *Religion and Politics*. Accessed on 5/3/17 [<http://religionandpolitics.org/2013/11/19>]

## The Claim of U.S. Exceptionalism within a Context of Race, Gender and Class Inequality

- /abraham-lincolns-gettysburg-address-150-years-later/]
- [25] Rachman, Gideon (2017). *Easternization: Asia's Rise and America's Decline from Obama to Trump and Beyond*. New York: Other Press.
- [26] Rapoport, Ronald B., Alan I. Abramowitz & Walter J. Stone (June 23, 2016). Why Trump was Inevitable. *The New York Review of Books*. Accessed on 3/27/17 [<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/06/23/why-trump-was-inevitable/>]
- [27] Reich, Robert (2015). *Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf. Accessed on 3/27/17 [<http://1.droppdf.com/files/if7IP/saving-capitalism-for-the-many-not-the-f-robert-b-reich.pdf>]
- [28] Restad, Hilde E. (2015). *American Exceptionalism: An Idea That Made a Nation and Remade the World*. London: Routledge.
- [29] Rosenbaum, Robert A. & Douglas Brinkley (2003). *The Penguin Encyclopedia of American History*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.
- [30] Rothstein, Richard (2004). *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.
- [31] Sanders, Bernie (2016). *Our Revolution: A Future to Believe In*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books.
- [32] Schuck, Peter H. (2016). James Q. Wilson and American Exceptionalism. *National Affairs*. Accessed on 3/28/17 [<http://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/james-q-wilson-and-american-exceptionalism>]
- [33] Stiglitz, Joseph E. (2012). *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- [34] Sumner, William Graham (1911). *War and Other Essays. Edited with Introduction by Albert Galloway Keller*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- [35] Tocqueville, Alexis de (2002). *Democracy in America*. Philadelphia, PA: A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication. Retrieved on 3/27/17 [<http://seas3.elte.hu/coursematerial/LojkoMiklos/Alexis-de-Tocqueville-Democracy-in-America.pdf>]
- [36] Versteeg, Mila & Emily Zackin (2014). American Constitutional Exceptionalism Revisited. *The University of Chicago Law Review* 81:1641-1707. Accessed on 3/30/17 [[https://lawreview.uchicago.edu/sites/lawreview.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/81\\_4/04%20Versteeg\\_Zackin\\_ART.pdf](https://lawreview.uchicago.edu/sites/lawreview.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/81_4/04%20Versteeg_Zackin_ART.pdf)]
- [37] Walt, Stephen M. (2011). The Myth of American Exceptionalism. *Foreign Policy*. 189:72-75. Accessed on 3/29/17 [<http://mouood.com/articles/occidentology/351-the-myth-of-american-exceptionalism.html?showall=&start=2>]
- [38] Weinberg, Steven (November 6, 2003). What Price Glory? Twenty Books on the History of War. *The New York Review of Books* 50(17):55-60. Accessed on 3/29/17 [<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2003/11/06/what-price-glory/>]
- [39] Wills, Garry (November 6, 2003). The Negro President. *The New York Review of Books* 50(17):45-51. Accessed on 3/29/17 [<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2003/11/06/the-negro-president/>]
- [40] Wills, Gerry (2005). *Negro President: Jefferson and the Slave Power*. Harcourt, CN: Houghton Mifflin.

**Citation:** Komanduri S. Murty, Julian B. Roebuck, "The Claim of U.S. Exceptionalism within a Context of Race, Gender and Class Inequality", *Journal of Law and Judicial System*, 2(2), 2019, pp. 7-17

**Copyright:** © 2019 Komanduri S. Murty. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.