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Myths of the Modern American Mind: American Exceptionalism

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“[R]ecent events compel us to raise anew. From the beginning, the most serious and systematic attempts to write Universal Histories saw the central issue in history as the development of Freedom. History was not a blind concatenation of events, but a meaningful whole in which human ideas concerning the nature of a just political and social order developed and played themselves out. And if we are now at a point where we cannot imagine a world substantially different from our own, in which there is no apparent or obvious way in which the future will represent a fundamental improvement over our current order, then we must also take into consideration the possibility that History itself might be at an end.”

— Francis Fukuyama

The debate around the nuclear negotiations with Iran tends to focus on one of two issues: are the terms of the deal good enough, and can Iran be made to stick to its end of the bargain? Those are both significant issues. But there's another question hanging over the viability of any Iran deal, one that proponents of talks have not paid much attention to: will the US be willing to hold Iran to account? Vox

Ok, I admit it. I thought this framework was going to suck. Actually, it's not bad. My main concern all along was that the P5+1 countries (technically the E3/EU+3; congratulations if you know the difference) were too focused on “breakout time” — imposing arbitrary limits on Iran's centrifuge program to ensure that if Iran used its known nuclear infrastructure, it would take at least a year to build a bomb . . . Still, the details are pretty interesting. The big-ticket item for the U.S. national security community will be the “breakout” timeline. I am not going to do a calculation, but the important parameters are about 5,000 centrifuges enriching to less than 3.7 percent and a reduction in the existing stockpile of low-enriched uranium to 300 kilograms. The fact sheet claims this extends the breakout timeline from two to three months to more than a year. I don't see any reason to doubt the administration's math, but I just don't think the breakout timeline matters. So I will just step aside and let other people who are invested in this argument fight it out. (Lewis *Foreign Policy*)

The announcement continues a losing streak for American writers, who have been passed over for 20 years. The last American to win the prize was Toni Morrison, in 1993. (NYT story announcing Alice Munro winning the Nobel Prize for literature)

It hath been deservedly esteemed one of the great and wonderful works of God in this last age, that the Lord stirred up the spirits of so many thousands of his servants, to leave the pleasant land of England, the land of their nativity, and to transport themselves, and families, over the ocean sea, into a desert land in America, at the distance of a thousand leagues from their own country; and this, merely on the account of pure and undefiled Religion, not knowing how they should have their daily bread, but trusting in God for that, in the way of seeking first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof: And that the Lord was pleased to grant such a gracious presence of his with them, and such a blessing upon their undertakings, that within a few years a wilderness was subdued before them, and so many Colonies planted, Towns erected, and Churches settled, wherein the true and living God in Christ Jesus, is worshipped and served, in a place where, time out of mind, had been nothing before but *Heathenism, Idolatry, and Devil-worship*; and that the Lord has added so many of the blessings of Heaven and earth for the comfortable subsistence of his people in these ends of the earth. Surely of this work, and of this time, it shall be said, *what hath God wrought!* And, *this is the Lord's doings, it is marvellous in our eyes!* Even so (O Lord) *didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name!* Now, one generation passeth away, and another cometh. The first generation of our fathers, that began this plantation of New-England, most of them in their middle age, and many of them in their declining years, who, after they had served the will of God, in laying the foundation (as we hope) of many generations, and given an example of true reformed Religion in the faith and order of the gospel, according to their best light from the words of God, they are now gathered unto their fathers. There hath been another generation succeeding the first, either of such as come over with their parents very young, or were born in the country, and these have had the managing of the publick affairs for many years, but are apparently passing away, as their fathers before them. There is also a third generation, who are grown up, and begin to stand thick upon the stage of action, at this day, and these were all born in the country, and may call New-England their native land. Now, in respect of what the Lord hath done for these generations, succeeding one another, we have abundant cause of Thanksgiving to the Lord our God, who hath so increased and blessed this people, that from a day of small things, he has brought us to be, what we now are. We may set up an EBENEZER, and say, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us." Yet in respect of our present state, we have need earnestly to pray, as we are directed, "Let thy work farther appear unto thy servants, and let thy beauty be upon us, and thy glory upon our children; establish thou the works of these our hands; yea, the works of our hands, establish thou them."

For, if we look on the dark side, the humane side of this work, there is much of humane weakness, and imperfection hath appeared in all that hath been done by man, as was acknowledged by our fathers before us. Neither was New-England ever without some fatherly chastisements from God; shewing that He is not fond of the formalities of any people upon earth, but expects the realities of practical Godliness, according to our profession and engagement unto him. Much more may we, the children of such fathers, lament our gradual degeneracy from that life and power of Godliness, that was in them, and the many provoking evils that are amongst us; which have moved our God severely to witness against us, more than in our first times, by his lesser judgments going before, and his greater judgments following after; he shot off his warning-pieces first, but his murdering-pieces have come after them, in so much as in these calamitous times, the changes of wars of Europe have had such a malignant influence upon us in America, that we are at this day greatly diminished and brought low, through oppression, affliction, and sorrow.