



American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword

Seymour Martin Lipset

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Is America unique? One of our major political analysts explores the deeply held but often inarticulated beliefs that shape the American creed.

"American values are quite complex," writes Seymour Martin Lipset, "particularly because of paradoxes within our culture that permit pernicious and beneficial social phenomena to arise simultaneously from the same basic beliefs."

Born out of revolution, the United States has always considered itself an exceptional country of citizens unified by an allegiance to a common set of ideals, individualism, anti-statism, populism, and egalitarianism. This ideology, Professor Lipset observes, defines the limits of political debate in the United States and shapes our society.

American Exceptionalism explains why socialism has never taken hold in the United States, why Americans are resistant to absolute quotas as a way to integrate blacks and other minorities, and why American religion and foreign policy have a moralistic, crusading streak.

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